

INFORMATION
READY
ALREADY
STEP AWAY FROM THE CAR
STEPS
HELP SEND ME SOME PRICE SIGNALS!
YOUNG AND OLD ARE DIFFERENT
AS LONG AS IT'S FAIR



BAD HABITS & HARD CHOICES

IN SEARCH OF SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES



BROOKLYNDHURST

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Brook Lyndhurst Ltd is a strategic research consultancy that applies unconventional thinking and economic analysis to questions of sustainability. On behalf of clients from the public, private and voluntary sectors, we develop solutions for both strategy and individual projects. We are concerned, in particular, with the behavioural aspects of sustainability. We are convinced that progress towards a more sustainable economy will come about through changes in the behaviour of individuals, households, businesses, institutions and government.

Our recent work includes:

- *Household Waste Behaviour in London* for the Resource Recovery Forum, RRF
- *Attitudes to Renewable Energy* for London Renewables
- *Liveability & Sustainability* for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
- *The Environment Sector in London* for the London Development Agency
- *Building for Health* for the NHS and the Carbon Trust
- *Environmental Exclusion: A Review* for the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
- *Sustainable Cities & the Ageing Society* for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Further details can be found on our website: www.brooklyndhurst.co.uk

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We had some questions...

The people of Britain don't appear to behave in a very sustainable way. We don't recycle as much as our European partners; we drive our cars all the time; we're wasteful with energy, consumer goods and resources of all kinds; and most of us live lifestyles that somehow manage to despoil the environment and promote social inequality at the same time.

Why do we do this? Is it because we don't believe that environmental issues are important? Or because they might cost us money that we'd rather spend on other things? Or because we're too busy? Or too bored?

Maybe we don't have enough choice: what kind of environmental choices do the people of Britain really have – and do we really want them?

And if the people of Britain did want to be able to make 'good' environmental choices, what kind of help might they need? Leaflets? Money? Instruction? Should they help themselves, or is it someone else's job?

To help answer some of these questions, Brook Lyndhurst commissioned ICM to survey 1,015 British adults, and we found that a representative sample of the British public:

- Believe the environment is being damaged by human activity
- Feel well informed about the kinds of things they personally could do to help
- Don't actually do many of these things
- Are looking for a strong lead from central government
- And think that more, and more obvious government interventions would be a fair way of making things better

Four things in particular struck us about the results:

- Information and awareness are not enough – people seem to have quite a lot of information and awareness already...
- The young and the old are different – and will require very different kinds of help to become 'sustainable consumers'...
- The public will pay as long as it's fair – and as long as it's seen to be fair...
- But the car is the exception – and changing people's attitudes towards their cars will be exceptionally difficult...

In this report, we begin by discussing these four issues. We then set out the detailed results from our survey and, finally, we provide a copy of the questionnaire and details of the methodology.

We hope you find the results as interesting as we did and that these findings go some way towards helping us all to become a little more sustainable.

Four themes

YOU TOLD US ALREADY Information and awareness are not enough...

How much yoghurt do I need? More accurately, how many yoghurts do I need to be able to choose between? I do not have the time, energy or inclination to test all the available yoghurts. There appear to be thousands of them. So I get by on an awkward mix of brand, packaging, convenience, price and, if I can remember, the taste. Oh, and maybe the health benefits. And whether there's enough room in my basket.

Someone told me – or maybe it was an advert – that there was a new, more environment-friendly yoghurt. Apparently the cows are treated more humanely, and the pot rots if you put it in a compost heap, and even the bio-active bugs are happier, apparently.

I haven't tried the new yoghurt yet. I know that it would probably be better all round if I did eat the new yoghurt – healthy organic low waste option that it is. But somehow it just doesn't seem to happen.

I am not, I now know, alone. We asked 1,015 adults: "Do you feel reasonably well informed about what you personally could do to be more environmentally friendly?" Four out of five of them said yes¹, they do feel well informed; and most can identify at least some of the specific actions – drive less, switch off the lights, recycle more – that would make a difference.

Asked, however, which of these environmentally friendly behaviours they actually undertook, and only around one in fifteen said that they regularly do more than just a handful of these things².

So it seems we all know what to do; but none of us do it. Why's that?

To match the size of this question, there is a large and rapidly developing research literature coming from academic, commercial and policy angles. In the past couple of years the UK has launched its first framework for sustainable production and consumption³: the UK Sustainable Development Commission is pursuing an enquiry under the heading 'Redefining Prosperity' (and, in conjunction with the National Consumer Council, has set up the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable⁴); while the Strategy Unit at Downing Street has produced a paper on the subject of personal responsibility and behaviour change⁵.

A common thread across the research thus far is the notion that there are 'barriers' that prevent our good intentions from being converted into positive actions. As Professor Paul Ekins suggests⁶, the "barriers may be institutional or infrastructural, related to social norms or expectations, derive from existing habits, lifestyles or preferences, or reflect shortages of time or money... A single barrier of any of these kinds may be enough to prevent a public policy from having its desired effect".

We also need to appreciate the delicacy of enquiry in this field. Issues of personal behaviour and responsibility invariably evoke difficulties in philosophical, psychological and political terms. Whether in the field of smoking, seatbelts or, latterly, obesity, intervention by the State in how we choose to live our lives – even when it's 'for our own good' – can be a fraught, time-consuming process.

Hardly surprising, given that prognosis, that government prefers to follow the market-led route, in which we are given 'information and awareness' so that

¹ Details for each of the survey results quoted in this section are in the signposted part of the next section - in this case Section D3 ² See Section B3 ³ See www.defra.gov.uk/environment/business ⁴ See www.sustainable-development.gov.uk ⁵ *Personal Responsibility & Changing Behaviour: the state of knowledge and its implications for public policy*, Strategy Unit (2004), www.strategy.gov.uk ⁶ See www.esrc.ac.uk

we can make our own ‘good choices’. If enough of us ‘choose’ the best environmental option, then – the argument runs – the market will provide it.

Well I’ve been to the yoghurt counter, and I need a little help. The barriers that prevent me from making the best environmental choice are too big and too complicated. Give me yet more information, and I may still not actually choose the sustainable yoghurt. Maybe I just don’t care (enough); maybe the actual *reward* I would get from it – that bundle of taste, value for money and ethical glow – just isn’t as good as an alternative.

There are plenty of outstanding issues here, but one clear conclusion thus far: right now, neither I, nor the majority of the rest of Britain, need my awareness raised about the environment. The time, money and effort could best be spent on something else.

HITTING THE TARGET

The young and the old are different...

One possible way of spending the money would be to target the *specific information needs* of different groups. This doesn’t mean generalised ‘do your bit’ campaigns: it means postcard-sized reminders to people who forget to do their recycling; it means promoting green energy schemes to ‘early adopters’; it means radio adverts reminding middle-aged commuters that steadier driving saves money *and* the environment.

Two groups in our survey that showed very distinctive attitudes and behaviours towards the environment, and thus illustrate this point, were the ‘young’ – aged 18–24 – and the old(er)⁷ – aged over 65.

Like everyone else, the young and the old share the feeling that they are reasonably well informed about what they personally could do to help protect and improve the environment. By and large, however, the survey reveals a picture in which younger people believe that the environment is being harmed by human activity and there are many actions that individuals could take to address the problem, but they don’t get around actually to doing anything; whereas older people are less convinced by the ‘environmental case’ – but are much more likely, across a range of behaviours, to be acting in a more environment-friendly way.

This pattern appears to have two main elements: *generational effects and cohort effects*.

On the one hand, young people tend not merely to be idealist (and therefore to have strong views about making the world a better place) but are also typically somewhat disorganised. Although there are, of course, exceptions, it tends only to be as people settle down – with marriage/cohabitation, stable employment, home ownership, children and so forth – that there is room to incorporate environment-friendly behaviour in a systematic, regular fashion. By the time individuals have reached retirement, not only are most behavioural patterns well established or even entrenched, but levels of overall consumption drop markedly (often as a result of income constraints). Many environment-friendly behaviours on the part of older people – and, indeed, other less well-off groups – may be as much economic in their origin as environmental.

These generational effects are augmented by a powerful cohort effect. The current

⁷ We are very aware that ‘old’ is a term that is wholly inappropriate for a great number of those aged 65 and over; however, we beg the reader’s indulgence to use the term for the sake of brevity (given the lack of a succinct and specific synonym)

cohort of older people grew up during or immediately after the Second World War, and the experience of austerity has profoundly influenced their view on the use of resources. Today's young people, by contrast, are completely steeped in the contemporary capitalist culture of consumerism, and – amongst other things – find the idea of re-using or repairing things difficult to fathom⁸.

From an 'information and awareness' point of view, this means – as, in fact, an increasing proportion of government advertising/propaganda/public information already reflects – targeted messages for targeted audiences to give them the help that they need.

The same principle also applies, however, towards other potential interventions. Careful targeting of, for example, fiscal instruments, is commonplace these days. The days of relying upon crude changes in the basic rate of income tax to achieve economic and social policy ends seem to have gone; instead, the tax-and-benefits system is micro-managed in order to target very specific groups, places or problems, against a background of macro-economic stability.

Yet what is also apparent is that this micro-management has so far concentrated overwhelmingly upon economic and social issues, not environmental ones. Or at least, in the domain of consumer or household-oriented tax-and-benefits, this is the case. In the domain of corporations, there is a steadily escalating array of micro-interventions, including the Climate Change Levy on business's energy bills, the Renewables Obligation on electricity generators, Landfill Tax on the disposal of

waste and the Emissions Trading Scheme⁹.

These are all well and good, but is it possible for a tax to be designed that could make this sustainable yoghurt here cheaper than that nasty one over there and for it to do so without being unfair on all the other people at the yoghurt counter? Or is yoghurt too complicated?

HELP! SEND ME SOME PRICE SIGNALS!

The public will pay as long as it's fair...

Just in case yoghurt really is too complicated, the questions we asked in our survey were about things like recycling, low-energy light bulbs, and shopping generally. We wanted to find out, firstly, how people respond to the idea of taxes and other possible interventions designed to promote environment-friendly behaviour; and, secondly, whether there were any differences in the views of different groups in the population.

We developed our questions in the light of our recent experience investigating other aspects of consumer behaviour. Researching issues associated with direct charging for waste services, for example¹⁰, we found that householders were concerned that the money raised would simply become part of general council spending; that people without proper services might be penalised; and that people who did a lot of recycling might not benefit proportionately. In short, people were not so much against the idea of charging *per se* – rather, they were concerned that a charging scheme should be both fair, and seen to be fair.

⁸ Recent research – such as our own *Sustainable Cities and the Ageing Society* for the ODPM, *Household Waste Behaviour in London* for the Resource Recovery Forum and *The New Old: Why Baby Boomers Won't Be Pensioned Off* from Demos – provides much more detailed information on these generational and cohort effects, and how they might interact with one another over time, as well as other aspects of behavioural differences between the young and the old. ⁹ See *Tax & the Environment – Using Economic Instruments*, HM Treasury 2002, and also ACBE's *Green Taxation: Final Report* and HM Treasury's responses available from www.defra.gov.uk/environment/acbe ¹⁰ *Household Waste Behaviour in London, Parts 1 and 2*, Brook Lyndhurst for Resource Recovery Forum, 2001 and 2003. Details for each of the survey results quoted in this section are in the signposted part of the next section – in this case Section D3

We were also mindful of the need for an appropriate context for questions. In our work on consumer attitudes towards renewable energy in London¹¹, for example, we showed pictures of wind turbines to people in focus groups and sought opinions on their attractiveness or otherwise: and we found that some people like them, and some people don't. When, however, we showed a picture of a wind turbine alongside a picture of an electricity pylon, there was a marked drop in the number of people saying that they thought the wind turbine was unattractive.

So rather than asking 'Do you think it would be fair or unfair for there to be lower VAT on energy efficient light bulbs', we asked: 'Do you think it would be fair or unfair for there to be *lower* VAT on energy efficient light bulbs and *higher* VAT on normal light bulbs?'

In this case, three quarters thought it would be fair, and a quarter thought it would be unfair.

In fact, with just one exception, the various interventions suggested by our questions were considered either fair or very fair by a majority of respondents¹²; and, with only mild variations, these views are held irrespective of class, age or tenure type.

The results strongly suggest to us that the British public is ready for robust intervention from government – including eco-taxes – to promote and protect the environment. Our survey results do not tell us whether the public expect such interventions to be fiscally neutral, suitably progressive and carefully explained – in the way, for example, suggested by the ACBE report mentioned earlier – but the public realise that they

have some bad habits; and they know that someone, somewhere, has to make some hard choices. They seem to be looking to government to act, and to make it much more straightforward for them – us – to make environment-friendly, sustainable choices.

The single and striking exception to this picture, however, concerns not yoghurt, but the car.

STEP AWAY FROM THE CAR The car is the exception...

Two thirds of respondents to our survey acknowledge that making fewer journeys by car would make a lot of difference to the environment. However, when we asked: 'To what extent do you think it would be fair or unfair to increase the price of petrol in order to reduce the amount we drive?', fewer than a third of respondents said they think it would be fair. Seven out of ten respondents believe it would be unfair. This is true even among those whose other behaviours classify them as 'Environmental Activists'.

These results provide a clear example of the phenomenon referred to earlier – namely, a situation where significant barriers prevent individual consumers from having, making, or even wanting, the 'sustainable choice'.

In the case of the car, the barriers appear to be a complex mix of the practical and the psychological. At a practical level, the car is a deeply embedded feature of our lifestyles in terms of delivering convenient mobility. Over a fifty year period, progressive increases in car ownership have facilitated an ever greater dispersal of shops, homes and workplaces; and this ever-greater dispersal in turn requires

¹¹ *Attitudes towards Renewable Energy in London*, Brook Lyndhurst for London Renewables 2003 ¹² See Section F3

more and more people to have cars; which facilitates ever greater dispersal; and so on.

This 'co-evolutionary' cycle of development has been powerfully reinforced by the way in which the car has come to provide a series of non-functional roles, for example in the way it symbolises affluence, status, individualism and identity.

If weaning Britain's drivers away from their cars is to be part of a strategy for bringing about more sustainable lifestyles – and it would seem that it has to be – then providing safe, reliable and cheap public transport is an integral part of the solution; but so too is dealing with the many other barriers. This will require us to go beyond the merely economic, and explore alternative, smarter interventions that draw upon psychological, sociological and ecological theories of behaviour. In this context, the Strategy Unit's recent paper¹³ and Defra's review on these issues¹⁴ are both welcome signs – but much more still needs to be done.

In the current context, our survey has a further and important implication: if the fuel protests of 2000 have been interpreted as a sign that Britain's taxpayers will resist eco-taxation generally, then this is misplaced. The car is different. When asked about energy, or waste, or food, the British consumer already appears willing to countenance taxes and other overt interventions that are designed to change behaviour in a more sustainable direction. But in the case of their cars, overcoming the barriers will require a prolonged, steady and unambiguous period of preparatory pressure – and considerable political courage.

¹³ *Personal Responsibility & Changing Behaviour: the state of knowledge and its implications for public policy*, Strategy Unit (2004), www.strategy.gov.uk ¹⁴ *The Impact of Sustainable Development on Public Behaviour*, Report A, Darnton (2004) for Defra

The findings

The purpose of this section of the report is to provide a detailed analysis of the survey results, presenting headline findings alongside variations according to socio-economic group.

The analysis follows six main lines of enquiry:

- The public's overall concern about environmental issues;
- The current extent of sustainable behaviour;
- The link between attitudes and behaviour;
- Levels of awareness;
- Sustainable lifestyles and consumerism;
- The perceived fairness of potential policy interventions for sustainability.

These are now discussed in turn. Each begins with an outline of the original research proposition(s) that we set out to explore through the survey, followed by presentation of the data (Figures 1-10 and Tables 1 & 2) and commentary on the key findings.

A Public concern about the environment

Our first line of enquiry concerned a simple question:

Are the public still concerned about environmental issues or do they feel they have been exaggerated?

The results are emphatic: over two thirds (69%) disagree with the suggestion that we are not damaging the environment (Figure 1). This includes close to half (49%) who 'strongly disagree', demonstrating a strong commitment to this belief¹⁵.

Nevertheless, a significant minority (24%) agree environmental degradation has been exaggerated; including more than one in ten (12%) who do so 'strongly'. It is also noteworthy that only a few people (6%) are undecided or feel too uninformed to make a decision, suggesting that – irrespective of opinion – people are able to engage with the issue and form a judgement one way or the other.

Older people and council tenants are both more likely than average to agree the issue has been exaggerated. In contrast, younger groups appear more likely to reject this suggestion, as well as those in social class AB.

However, even when taking account of these variations it is important to note that a majority across *all* socio-economic groups believe environmental damage remains a cause for concern.

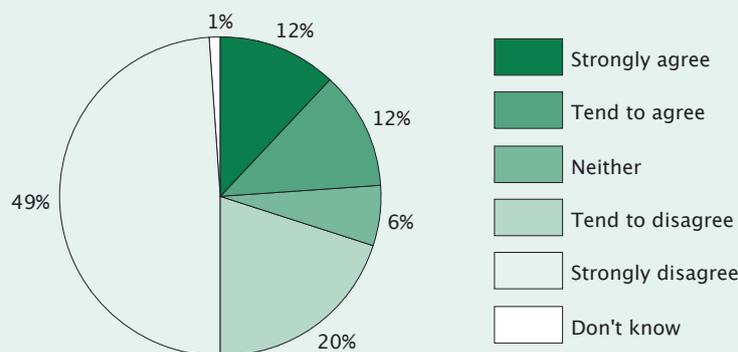
B Sustainable lifestyles: ideal or reality?

Having established that the environment remains an issue of public concern, this section explores the current 'state of play' in relation to a range of behaviours that could be said to contribute towards the ideal of a

FIGURE 1 Are environmental concerns exaggerated?

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement...

I don't really think we are damaging the environment, it has been exaggerated



Base 1,015 adults 18+, Great Britain, telephone interviews, ICM/Brook Lyndhurst, May 2004

¹⁵ It is generally more common for responses – on a five point scale such as this – to cluster in the 'tend to' agree/disagree categories. Therefore, any clusters in the 'strongly' agree/disagree categories – as is the case with this question – demonstrate a stronger depth of opinion.

‘sustainable lifestyle’. An illustrative list of eight specific behaviours – reflecting the impact of people as householders, consumers and commuters – was chosen to explore three research propositions:

To what extent are the public undertaking specific sustainable behaviours, like recycling or using the car less?

To what extent are such actions systematic across a range of behaviours, or ad hoc and limited to a few specific activities?

Are there any significant variations in sustainable behaviour according to socio-economic influences?

As a general note, it is important to apply a level of caution when interpreting the findings from behavioural questions. The phenomenon of ‘over-reporting’¹⁶ is well known; many surveys have often recorded recycling participation, for example, at levels that are at odds with the reality of actual recycling rates.

While a certain degree of inaccuracy is perhaps inevitable in respect of subjective self-reported

behaviour, this can nonetheless be minimised through careful question design¹⁷.

B1 ACTION ON INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOURS

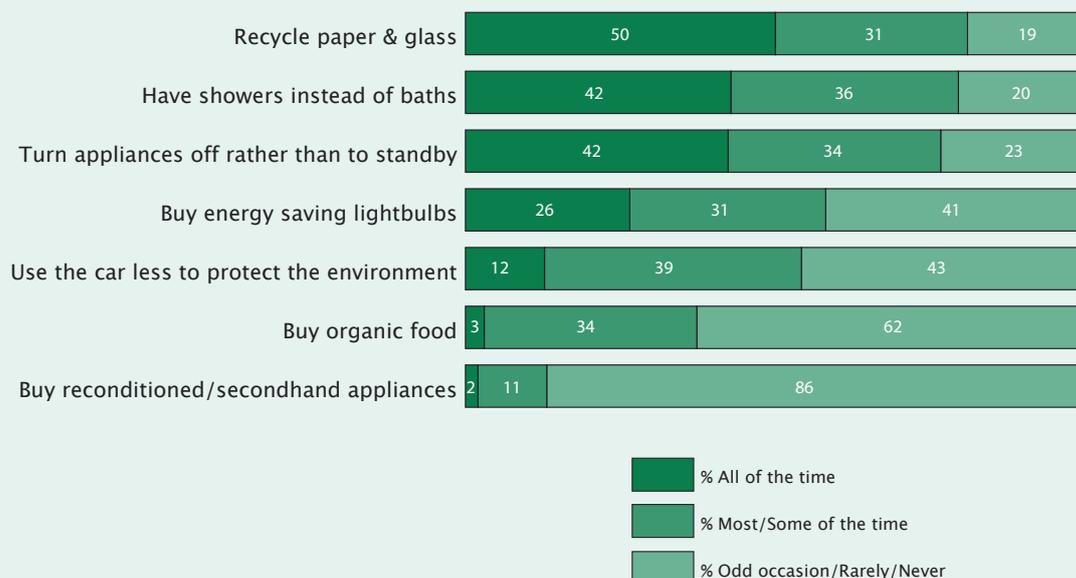
The results from the survey suggest progress on several routine sustainable household activities (Figure 2). For example, recycling – at least in terms of paper and glass – appears to be becoming a more mainstream activity; half (50%) say they recycle these two materials ‘all of the time’. Similarly, close to two in five claim they always have showers instead of baths (42%) and turn electrical appliances off completely rather than to standby (42%).

Nevertheless, it is still important to note that a large proportion of the population are not yet habitually undertaking these actions. Indeed, a significant minority (19%, 20% and 23% respectively) are not meaningfully engaged at all, representing a “hard core” of the population who are particularly resistant to the shift towards sustainable lifestyles.

Furthermore – turning the focus to other forms of sustainable behaviour – the survey suggests much slower progress. For example, while around one in

FIGURE 2 Current levels of sustainable household behaviour

Q: How often, if at all, do you personally...?



Base: 1,015 adults 18+, Great Britain, telephone interviews, ICM/Brook Lyndhurst, May 2004
(* Base: 782 owners of 1 or more cars)

¹⁶ Over-reporting may occur because people respond according to what they think they *should* be doing rather than what they *actually* do, or if they simply have low expectations about what qualifies as ‘regular’ recycling – e.g. all newspapers or just a few? ¹⁷ We adopted a six point scale to distinguish between *different* levels of action – with a mixture of ‘strict’ categories such as ‘all of the time’ and ‘never’ alongside those which allow for a more wide ranging response – e.g. ‘most of the time’, ‘some of the time’, ‘the odd occasion’ and ‘rarely’.

four (26%) say they buy energy efficient light bulbs 'all of the time', they are outnumbered by those who 'never', 'rarely' or only on the 'odd occasion' do so (41%). Action on car use remains a significant problem; only around one in ten (12%) car owners always try to drive less to protect the environment, in contrast to over two in five (43%) who do little if anything.

It is also clear that buying organic food remains a niche behaviour; only around one in thirty (3%) purchase these products 'all of the time', close to one in three (34%) buy them occasionally, while almost two thirds (62%) rarely or never do so. The purchase of reconditioned/second-hand electrical appliances is even less frequent; only one in fifty people (2%) buy them 'all of the time', whereas over four in five (86%) have never, rarely or only on the odd occasion done so.

Taken together, the results highlight variations across different 'types' of sustainable behaviour. Adopting the findings of a recent ESRC study¹⁸, there are, broadly speaking, three stages of the consumption 'process': the *purchase* of goods, their subsequent *use*, and finally their *disposal*. Our survey results suggest that while there has been progress on disposal and, to a lesser extent, the use of certain resources (e.g. energy and water, if not car use), action on the purchase of goods in the first place is an area of particular weakness and – for most people - often conspicuous by its absence.

B2 SYSTEMATIC PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOUR

On the basis of people's behaviour across *all* of the seven sustainable behaviours in Figure 2, a

composite 'environmental activism' scale can be developed. This reflects the extent to which current sustainable behaviours are systematic (i.e. across a range of actions) or discrete (i.e. limited to one or more specific actions but not others). Here, we have chosen to differentiate between three core groups: 'Highs', 'Mediums' and 'Lows'¹⁹.

The scale suggests that only a small minority of the population – around one in fifteen (7%) – are Highs; that is, they habitually undertake a range of sustainable behaviours (Figure 3). In contrast, almost half (48%) of the population are classified as Mediums, regularly undertaking some sustainable activities but not others. Finally, approaching half (45%) of the population are Lows, undertaking only few – and in some cases none – of the behaviours explored as part of this research.

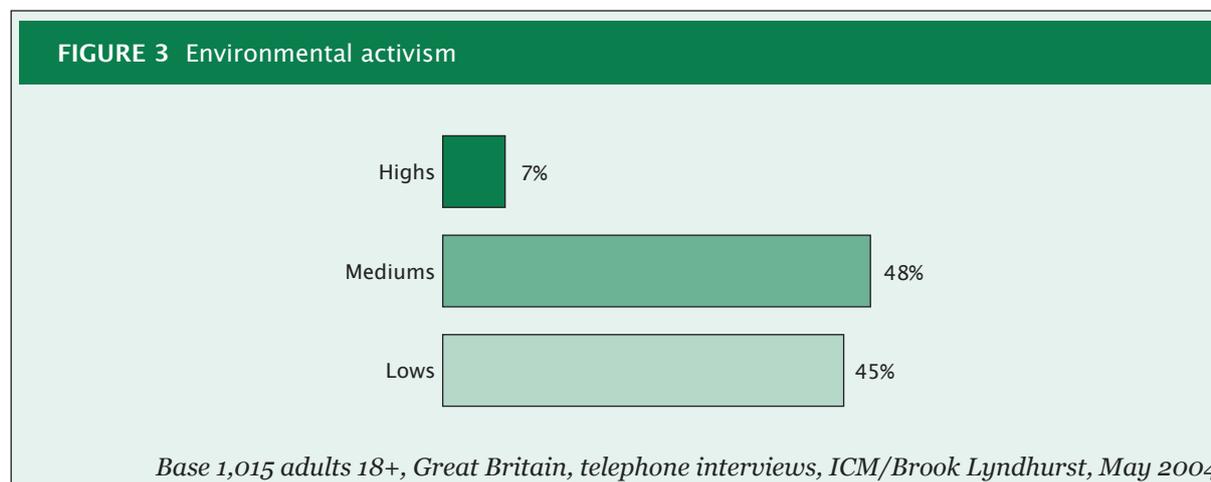
This demonstrates that while there has been some progress on *specific* individual lifestyles (e.g. recycling paper and glass), very few are *systematically* undertaking an integrated range of sustainable behaviours.

Therefore, the answer to our original research proposition is unequivocal: unsustainable household behaviour remains the norm.

B3 SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOUR BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUP

Variations in behaviour according to socio-economic factors are mixed, with some groups actively engaged in certain actions but not others. For example:

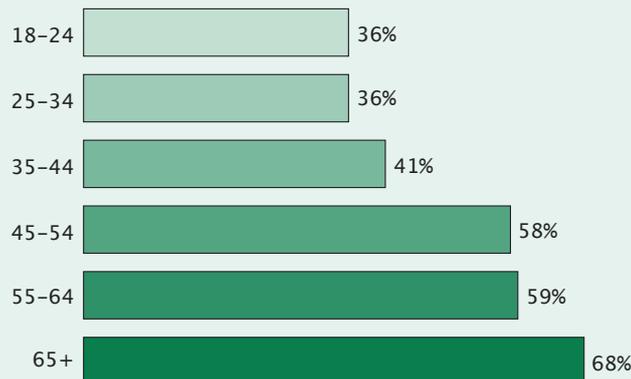
- Young people (18-24) are more likely than average to have showers as opposed to



¹⁸ Gilg & Ford (2003), *Environmental action in and around the home: linking attitudes and behaviour*, University of Exeter ¹⁹The number of categories and the criteria by which each is defined is by its nature subjective. In our survey, it was decided that those people undertaking between 5-7 of the sustainable actions 'all of the time' were classified as 'Highs'; those undertaking 2-4 actions 'all of the time' as 'Mediums'; and anyone undertaking 0-1 of the actions 'all of the time' were classified as 'Lows'.

FIGURE 4 Recycling behaviour by age group

% Recycling paper and glass 'all of the time'



Base: 1,015 adults 18+, Great Britain, telephone interviews, ICM/Brook Lyndhurst, May 2004

baths, and more likely to buy organic food. However, they are the *least likely* group to recycle²⁰ and - among those who own a car - least likely to make fewer journeys to protect the environment;

- Older people (65+) are more likely than average to recycle, make fewer journeys by car to protect the environment, and buy reconditioned/second hand appliances. However, they are less likely to use energy saving light bulbs and more likely to have baths than showers;
- Social class ABs are committed recyclers but this does not extend to making fewer journeys by car to protect the environment. In contrast, social class DEs are less likely to recycle but tend to make fewer journeys by car;
- Council tenants are less likely than average to recycle, have showers instead of baths or buy organic food. However, they are more likely than average to buy reconditioned appliances and actively save energy in the home.

Age appears to be a key factor that plays an often defining role in predicting the likelihood of sustainable behaviour. Taking recycling paper and glass as an example (Figure 4), only around one in

three (36%) 18-34 year olds claim to recycle these materials 'all of the time', compared to almost double that (68%) among those aged 65+.

While variations according to other socio-economic factors are also evident (as described above) they are *less consistent* than variations according to age. Indeed, the activism scale suggests that young people are typically one of the least sustainable groups *overall*; only one in twenty (5%) 18-24 year olds are classified as Highs, while as many as half (51%) are Lows (Table 1). This is in contrast to older age groups.

C The relationship between attitudes & behaviour

The purpose of this section of the survey is to explore the dynamic between *attitudes* and *behaviour*, specifically in relation to the following proposition:

To what extent do pro-environmental attitudes drive sustainable behaviours, as opposed to the role of other non-environmental influences?

It is clear that sustainable behaviour *can* flow from pro-environmental convictions; indeed, a range of studies have identified the link between lifestyles, behaviour and environmental values²¹. However,

²⁰ Our *Household Waste Behaviour in London* research (for the Resource Recovery Forum) found that the lifestyles of young people make them less interested in recycling, and they also often live in places where it is harder to recycle anyway (such as flats) ²¹ See, for example, Stern *et al* (1995), *The new ecological paradigm in social-psychological context*, *Environment and Behaviour* 27: 723-743

TABLE 1 Environmental activism by age

	Highs	Mediums	Lows
	%	%	%
18-24	5	44	51
25-34	6	42	52
35-44	7	46	47
45-54	5	48	46
55-64	7	54	39
65+	11	55	34

our survey suggests that the relationship is not necessarily straightforward. For example, the results have already established two key findings:

- Young people are *more* likely to think we are damaging the environment *in the abstract*, but are *less* likely to behave in a sustainable way *in practice*;
- In contrast, even though older age groups are *less* likely to think we are damaging the environment, they nonetheless seem *more* likely to adopt sustainable patterns of behaviour.

This highlights the potential for a disconnect between people's attitudes and values on the one

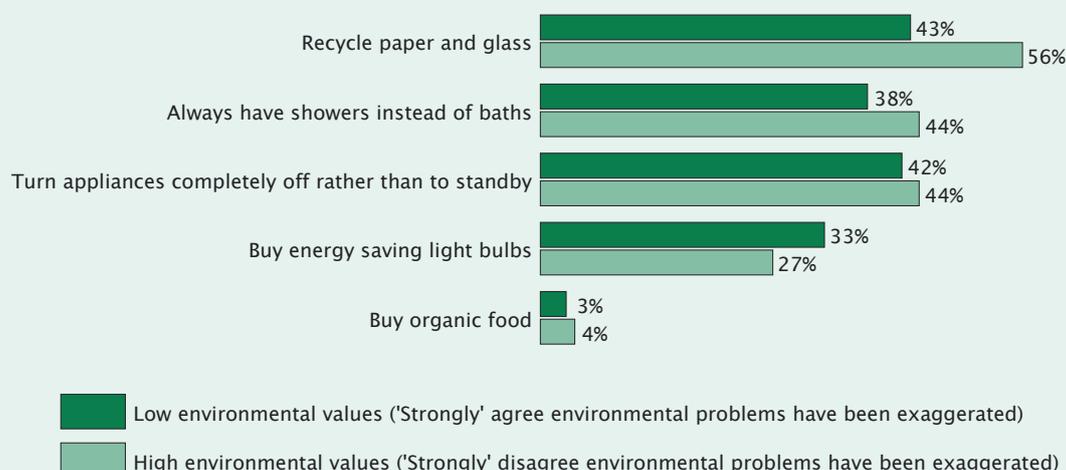
hand, and their lifestyle choices on the other. That is, personal values do not *automatically* translate into sustainable patterns of behaviour or sustainable lifestyle choices. This "Value-Action" gap is the subject of a growing body of work, summarised, for example, in the recent Strategy Unit paper²².

Importantly, our survey suggests that the reverse can also be true; that is, people appear capable of acting in sustainable ways *without* holding strong environmental values or beliefs. For example, close to two in five (43%) of those who 'strongly' agree that environmental damage has been exaggerated *still* claim to recycle 'all of the time' (Figure 5). That is, they habitually recycle despite less attachment or receptivity to the environmental ethos of recycling. In some cases – such as adopting energy efficient measures – those sceptical about claims about environment degradation are in fact *just as likely* as others to undertake a 'sustainable behaviour'.

Hence, the results appear to suggest that people don't *necessarily* have to be environmentalists in order to behave in environmentally responsible ways. In turn, this demands a better understanding of the influence of non-environmental drivers, for example social and cultural norms, or health and financial benefits.

FIGURE 5 Attitudes vs behaviour

% Undertaking activity 'all of the time'



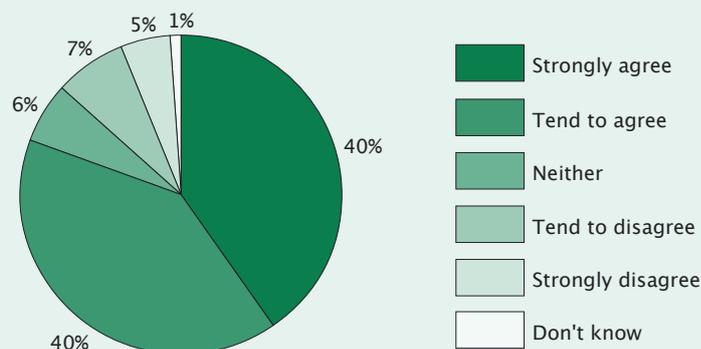
Base: 1,015 adults 18+, Great Britain, telephone interviews, ICM/Brook Lyndhurst, May 2004

²² Personal Responsibility and Changing Behaviour: the state of knowledge and its implications for public policy, Strategy Unit, 2004

FIGURE 6 Public awareness of sustainable household actions

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement...

I feel reasonable well informed about what I could do to be more environmentally friendly?



Base 1,015 adults 18+, Great Britain, telephone interviews, ICM/Brook Lyndhurst, May 2004

D Levels of awareness: do people know how to be sustainable?

There has recently been much discussion in the research literature about the need to provide the public with information so they can make 'better' choices. The *Living Smarter* work by INCPEN²³, for example, asserts that the public's view of what they could do to protect the environment is in fact quite different from what 'objectively' would be the best thing for them to do. The purpose of this section, therefore, is to explore three questions:

To what extent do the public feel informed about sustainable lifestyle choices they as individuals could make?

Which of these choices do the public think would be most worthwhile?

To what extent are the public more or less predisposed to undertake a sustainable behaviour depending on how much difference they feel it makes?

Our survey did not explore levels of understanding and awareness of the term 'sustainable development' itself (although for a discussion on this issue, see Darnton's (2004) recent work for Defra²⁴). Instead, we focused upon how aware people feel *in general* about what they could do to be more environmentally friendly, alongside

their awareness of a series of *specific* sustainable household actions.

D1 GENERAL AWARENESS

The vast majority of the public – as many as four in five (80%) – agree they feel reasonably well informed about what they could do to be more environment-friendly, including two in five (40%) who 'strongly' agree (Figure 6). In contrast, only a small minority of around one in ten disagree (12%).

This sense of general awareness applies *equally* across different socio-economic groups, showing little variation according to social class, age or gender. The only variation to note is in terms of *tenure*, with council tenants feeling less informed than average. However, the difference is relatively marginal; indeed, over two thirds (69%) among this group still feel reasonably well informed.

Furthermore, awareness also appears to vary only slightly according to the environmental activism scale. Even among those classified as Lows (i.e. those currently doing very little), over three quarters (77%) nonetheless feel reasonably well informed about what they *could* do to be more sustainable.

This suggests that a lack of awareness *per se* may not be a significant barrier to sustainable behaviour, since most people – including those not currently engaged – already feel informed at least to some degree.

²³ Towards Greener Households, INCPEN, further details at www.living-smarter.org ²⁴ The Impact of Sustainable Development on Public Behaviour, Report A, Darnton (2004) for Defra

D2 AWARENESS OF SPECIFIC ACTIONS

Although it is one thing to claim to feel reasonably well informed at a general level, we wanted to validate this in respect to *specific* household actions and, in particular, whether or not people consider these actions significant enough to make a difference (and hence be worth their effort).

In this respect, nearly three quarters of the public (72%) think that recycling paper and glass would make 'a lot of' difference to protecting the environment (Figure 7). Likewise, as many as two thirds (66%) think the same about making fewer journeys by car, while around half believe they can make a significant difference by having showers instead of baths (58%), turning appliances completely off rather than to standby (52%), and buying energy efficient light bulbs (50%). Hence, the public are largely aware of certain measures they could take to be more sustainable, and think these could make a difference if they undertook them.

However, this does not apply to all potential actions; relatively few people consider that buying organic food (18%), buying reconditioned electrical appliances (15%) or eating less meat (14%), for example, would make a significant difference to protecting the environment.

D3 IMPACT ON BEHAVIOUR

The relationship between *believing* an action will make a difference and *undertaking* it appears - on the surface at least - fairly straightforward. The survey evidence suggests that, as one might expect, there is greater likelihood of someone undertaking a particular action if they feel it will make a difference.

For example, among those who think turning appliances off rather than to standby can make 'a lot' of difference, over half (54%) actually do this 'all of the time'. In contrast, among those who don't think it would make much difference, only one in five (20%) habitually turn appliances off.

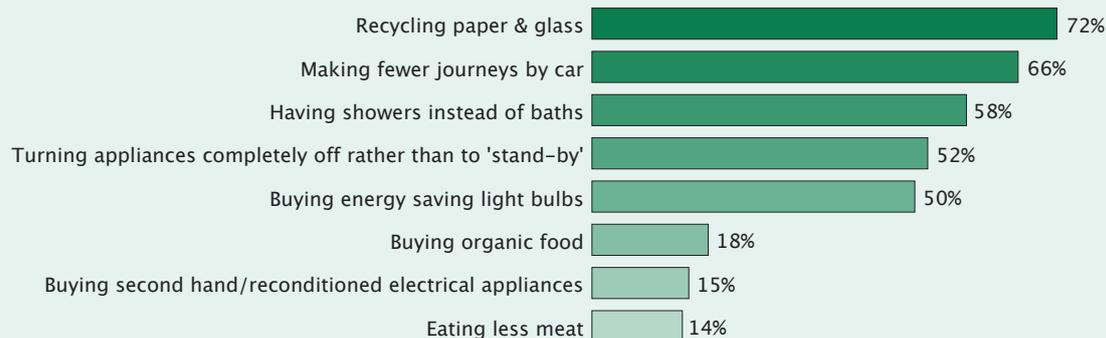
Nevertheless, there are several significant caveats to note:

- Believing an action will make a difference *is not enough on its own*. Indeed, there is a "gap" across all of the sustainable behaviours between *believing* an action is environmentally worthwhile and actually *doing it*. So, for example, while 72% think that recycling paper and glass could make 'a lot' of difference to the environment, only 50% habitually recycle these materials (a gap of 22 percentage points);

FIGURE 7 Awareness of specific sustainable household actions

Q: I'm going to read out a number of suggestions that have been made about the things that people could do to protect the environment. For each, please tell me whether you think it would make a lot of difference, make some difference, or would not make much difference?

% Who think it would make 'a lot of difference'



Base: 1,015 adults 18+, Great Britain, telephone interviews, ICM/Brook Lyndhurst, May 2004

- Car use is the most notable exception; those who recognise that making fewer journeys would make a big difference to the environment are in fact *no more likely* actually to drive less;
- It also appears that people don't *necessarily* need to believe an action will make a difference to the *environment* to still undertake it. For example, young people are the *least likely* to think having showers instead of baths will make much of a difference to the environment, but nonetheless the *most likely* group to actually have showers. Other factors – cultural, social or economic - may therefore be the driving influence for certain patterns of behaviour, *irrespective* of awareness of the environmental impact.

E The potential for sustainable consumerism

In addition to action in the home, the pursuit of sustainable lifestyles demands a consideration of the public's impact in their capacity as consumers, through their purchasing habits and "spending power". Accordingly, one of the lines of enquiry for our survey was as follows:

Can sustainable consumerism progress from the niche to the mainstream and drive change through the market?

Indeed, as we have already noted, progress on the *consumption* of goods appears much slower than progress on their *disposal* (e.g. through recycling). Therefore, the survey explored four key aspects which are now discussed in turn:

E1 PERCEPTIONS OF 'QUALITY'

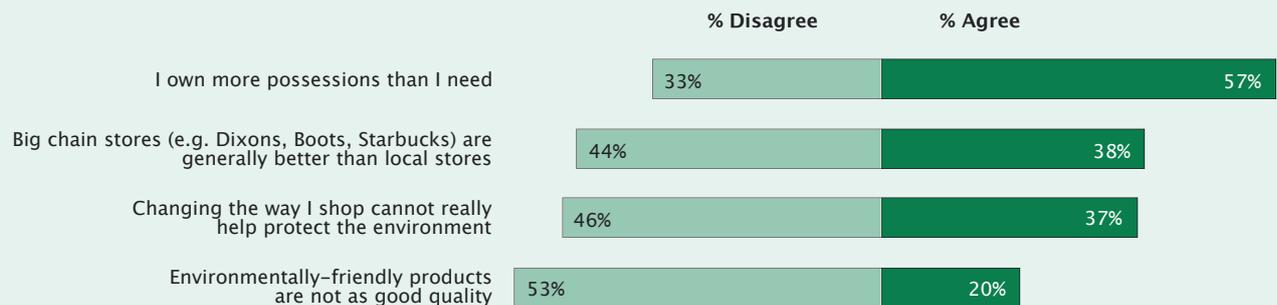
In contrast to recent qualitative research we have undertaken – which found that consumers still consider certain 'green' products inferior in comparison to their mainstream counterparts – the survey findings suggest that consumer perceptions of sustainable products may be becoming more favourable (Figure 8). Indeed, over half of consumers (53%) think that environment-friendly products are as good quality, compared with only one in five (20%) who do not. Given the conflicting research evidence, the extent to which a positive shift in consumer perceptions is underway may benefit from further qualitative research.

There are some variations of note according to socio-economic group. For example, younger people are more likely than average to view sustainable products favourably, as are those in social class ABC1.

Furthermore, the impact of consumer *perceptions* on *behaviour* still appears relatively limited. While only organic food was explored as part of the survey (demonstrating the niche status of the market in spite of rapid growth), recent Brook Lyndhurst research for the Countryside Agency²⁵ suggests that the broader spectrum of

FIGURE 8 Consumer attitudes to sustainability issues

Q: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements...?



Base: 1,015 adults 18+, Great Britain, telephone interviews, ICM/Brook Lyndhurst, May 2004

²⁵ Promoting Sustainable Local Products in Yorkshire & Humber, Countryside Agency/Brook Lyndhurst, 2004

environmental and ethical issues continue to remain secondary considerations behind price, convenience and brand.

E2 CONSUMPTION OF GOODS:

In respect of the *overall* amount of goods and products consumed, there is widespread recognition among the public that they own more than is strictly necessary. Over half (57%) agree that they 'own more possessions than they really need', including close to one in three (31%) who 'strongly' agree. This is, however, not always the case. Indeed, as many as one in three (33%) disagree.

The nature of the response divides strongly along socio-economic lines. For example, while as many as seven in ten (70%) of those in social class AB agree they own more possessions than they need, only around two in five (44%) of those in social class DE do so. Similarly, younger people are more likely to think they own more than they need, in contrast to older people. Council tenants are *least likely* to say they own more possessions than they need.

E3 LOCAL STORES VERSUS CHAINS

Opinion is divided as to whether big 'chain' stores are better than local stores; around two in five (38%) think they are, compared to a slightly larger proportion (44%) who disagree.

Variations according to socio-economic group again suggest a clear demarcation on the basis of social class, age and tenure. For example, home owners and those in social class AB are more likely to disagree that larger chains are better than local stores. In contrast, council tenants and younger people are more likely than average to consider larger stores more favourably.

E4 PERSONAL AGENCY

The extent to which people feel that they can make a difference is referred to as 'personal agency'. The survey suggests that opinion is divided on this issue; over one in three (37%) feel unable to personally bring about change, agreeing that 'changing the way I shop cannot really help protect the environment'. In contrast, approaching half (46%) disagree. Variations by socio-economic group in this instance are few and minor.

Interestingly, those who claim they feel they

can't make a difference are also more likely to think that sustainable products are of lower quality.

Therefore, the extent to which a lack of consumer action among this section of the public is actually down to a sense of powerlessness – or, alternatively, is a result of negative perceptions around quality and price – is perhaps open to debate.

F The "fairness" of policy interventions for sustainability

While our survey focused primarily upon the actions and behaviours of the public as agents (or not) of sustainability, we also wanted to assess attitudes to the role of government in bringing about behavioural change.

In particular, we wanted to explore the public's reaction to potential policy interventions – fiscal, regulatory and reward-based - in terms of their 'fairness'. We felt this is a readily understood and universal concept that often underpins how people make a judgement about a particular issue or debate. Therefore, our research propositions were as follows:

Do the public think that it is fair, in principle, for the government to intervene to promote sustainable development?

What is the public's reaction to the fairness (or otherwise) of specific potential measures? Is there a hierarchy of fairness between reward schemes, regulatory pressure or eco-taxation based upon the Polluter Pays Principle?

What factors determine whether or not a potential intervention is considered fair or unfair?

F1 THE FAIRNESS OF INTERVENTIONS IN THE ABSTRACT

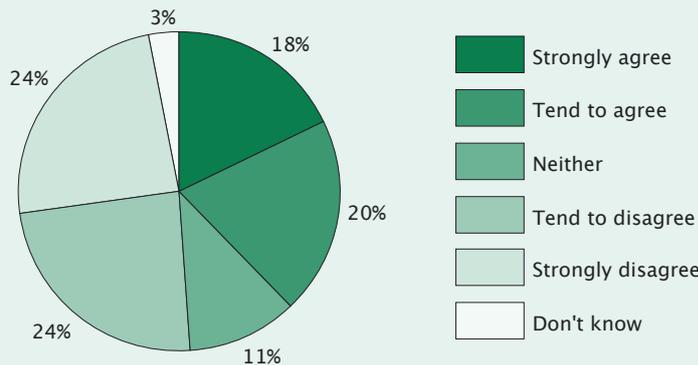
More than one in three (38%) think that government does *not* have the right to require people to behave in a more sustainable way, including close to one in five (18%) who 'strongly' take this position (Figure 9, see page 16). However, almost half (48%) believe the government *does* have the right to intervene in this way, including a significant minority of one in four (24%) who do so 'strongly'.

This distribution is relatively consistent

FIGURE 9 Attitudes towards Government intervention

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement...

The Government does not have the right to make people live in more environmentally friendly ways?



Base 1,015 adults 18+, Great Britain, telephone interviews, ICM/Brook Lyndhurst, May 2004

across all socio-economic groups, with the exception of older people who are notably more likely than average to object to the principle of government intervention for sustainable development.

F2 THE FAIRNESS OF INTERVENTIONS IN PRACTICE

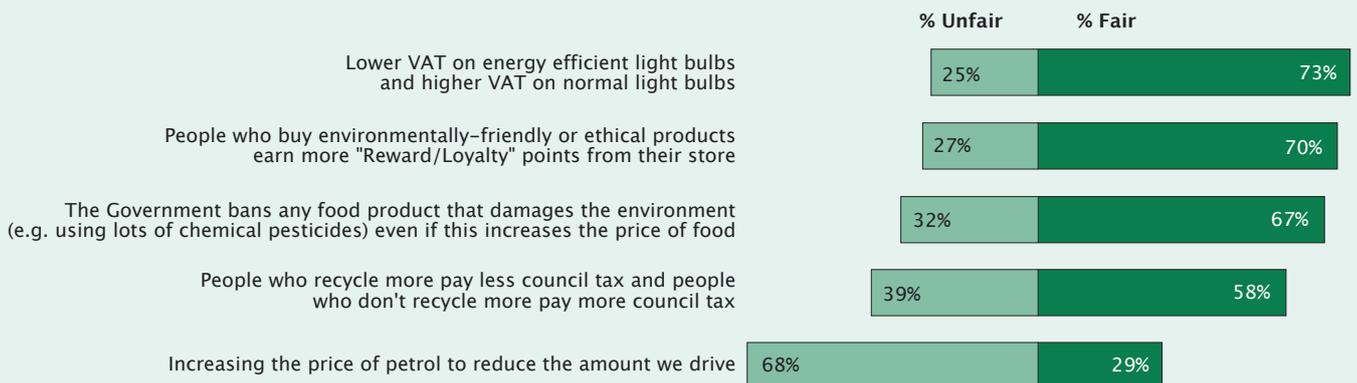
While perhaps divisive *in principle*, the issue of government intervention appears less contentious in respect of *specific* proposals. Indeed, a range of practical measures are advocated – often widely – as a fair thing for government to be pursuing (Figure 10).

For example, almost three quarters of the public (73%) believe variable VAT charging for electrical appliances on the grounds of energy efficiency is fair, while a similar proportion (70%) think the same is true of ‘reward’ points for people who buy environmentally-friendly products.

Furthermore, the public’s perception of fairness extends, perhaps more surprisingly, to potential measures that are more punitive in their application. For example, two in three people (67%) consider it fair that the government ban any food product that damages the environment *even if* it

FIGURE 10 Potential interventions: perceptions of ‘fairness’

Q: There are a number of things that Government could do to ensure that we protect the environment. To what extent do you think that the following suggestions would be fair or unfair...?



Base: 1,015 adults 18+, Great Britain, telephone interviews, ICM/Brook Lyndhurst, May 2004

increases the price of food. Similarly, almost six in ten (58%) think that variable waste charging – where those who recycle pay less council tax and those who don't pay more – is fair.

In fact, the *only* potential policy measure explored as part of this study that was roundly perceived to be unfair was the 'fuel escalator' policy of progressively increasing petrol prices. Almost seven in ten (68%) consider it unfair, including as many as two in five (40%) who think it 'very unfair'. Notwithstanding a 'silent' and rarely acknowledged minority of approaching one in three (29%) who buck the trend, this issue remains highly problematic for sustainable development (and for government).

F3 KEY DRIVERS OF FAIRNESS

Variations in the perceived fairness of potential policy interventions according to socio-economic influences are relatively few and minor. Only in terms of age and social class are significant differences evident. For example:

- young people appear more averse to government intervention through use of 'sticks' such as variable waste charging and more in favour of incentives such as 'reward points' for sustainable products. In contrast, the mid age groups (35-54) tend to be more supportive of a broader range of potential interventions, including sticks;
- those in social class ABC1 appear more supportive of interventions across the board than those in social class DE.

There is also, perhaps surprisingly, only minor variation according to overarching 'cultural mindsets', such as whether or not people feel the government has the right, in principle, to intervene for sustainable development. For example, among those who believe strongly that the government *does* have the right to intervene, close to seven in ten (69%) think banning any product that damages the environment is fair, compared to a similar proportion (64%) among those who don't think they have the right in principle.

In fact, the factor which appears most significant – at least for some potential interventions – is simply whether or not the action is currently being undertaken. Comparing perceived fairness according to the 'High', 'Medium' and 'Low' categories of the environmental activism scale reveals that a higher proportion of Highs consider policy interventions for sustainable development fair (Table 2).

This is particularly true of attitudes towards variable household waste charging. While almost two thirds (65%) of those who say they currently recycle paper and glass 'all of the time' consider variable waste charging fair, this is only true of around one in three (31%) who 'rarely' or 'never' recycle. Therefore, increasing the local recycling rate *before* the introduction of charging may be wise so as to increase the number of likely 'advocates' of such a scheme and hence use social 'norms' as a means of reinforcing acceptability.

TABLE 2 Perceived fairness according to the environmental activism scale

	% Consider the policy 'fair'		
	Highs	Mediums	Lows
Lower VAT on energy efficient light bulbs and higher VAT on normal light bulbs	86	74	69
People who buy environmentally-friendly/ethical products earn more 'reward/loyalty' points from their store	83	69	70
The government should ban any food product that damages the environment even if this increases the price	83	65	65
People who recycle more should pay less council tax and people who don't recycle should be charged more council tax	78	61	52
Increasing the price of petrol to reduce the amount we drive	33	31	25

Closing remarks

The results of this survey, together with our analysis, provide – we hope – a mix of information and insight that will be useful to individuals and organisations concerned with understanding and promoting sustainable consumption.

In our view, it is too early for formal conclusions, much less detailed recommendations on what should happen next. Instead, we find ourselves with yet more questions:-

- **Bangs per buck** – is it worth trying to make consumers sustainable across a whole raft of measures if tackling only one or two outweighs the benefits of all the others, however unpopular it may be? Do consumers really know, for example, that one flight to Ibiza outweighs – by far – any good they can do by recycling bottles every week?
- **Young people** – is their behaviour a future time bomb for sustainability – or can (should?) we help them become more sustainable as they get older? How can young people's other concerns be harnessed to tackle environmental 'bad habits' – such as, for example, food consumption in relation to obesity and health scares?
- **Tapping into non-environmental motivations** – does 'sustainability by stealth' work – and is it ethical? Can consumers be encouraged to make 'good' environmental choices by appealing to more immediate self interest (such as saving money through energy efficiency, or protecting local jobs by buying local food)?
- **Personal agency** – does sustainable consumption always have to be the hard choice? How can consumers be given the confidence to stray from mainstream culture, to know that they are making a difference – but with minimum hassle? Is there more than a feel-good factor to rewarding 'good' choices?
- **Sustainable mobility** – what can be done about cars? Is there a fairer (and more effective) way to change behaviour than fuel

prices? What would a more radical package of sticks and carrots look like, which avoids an ideological fixation with getting everyone out of cars and onto public transport, but at the same time fairly, and transparently, ensures that polluters pay?

- **Economic instruments** – where are the limits to voluntarism and persuading the public through information and exhortation? Where does consumer responsibility begin and end; and how can this be taxed or rewarded in fair and transparent ways?

Much of Brook Lyndhurst's work in the months (and years) ahead will be concerned with researching these questions; and, of course, our ongoing quest for the sustainable yoghurt. We look forward to sharing our results, and to participating in the debate about how best to move towards a pattern of consumption that is genuinely sustainable.

Questionnaire & results

- The results are based on 1,015 interviews conducted by ICM with residents aged 18+ in Great Britain, conducted by telephone between 12th – 14th May 2004;
- The questionnaire was designed by Brook Lyndhurst.
- Quotas were set on age, gender and work status to ensure the survey was representative;
- Data are weighted to match the profile of the population;
- Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' or 'not stated' categories, or multiple answers. An asterisk (*) denotes any value of less than half a percent but greater than zero.

QUESTION 1 How often, if at all, do you personally do any of the following?

	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Odd occasion	Rarely/ never	N/A + D/K
Recycle paper and glass	50	16	15	4	14	*
Buy energy saving light bulbs for the home	26	13	18	8	33	2
Buy second hand/reconditioned electrical appliances instead of new ones	2	2	9	7	79	1
Turn appliances off completely rather than to 'standby' (e.g. TV, stereo)	42	18	16	5	18	1
Buy organic food	3	6	28	16	46	1
Have showers instead of baths	42	21	15	5	14	3
Use the car less to protect the environment	10	11	22	9	28	20
Eat meat as part of your main meal	20	36	30	6	7	1

QUESTION 2 I'm now going to read out a number of suggestions that have been made about the things that people could do to protect the environment. For each, please tell me whether you think it would make a lot of difference, make some difference, or would not really make much difference?

	Lot of difference	Some difference	Not really much difference	N/A
Recycling paper and glass	72	24	4	*
Buying energy saving light bulbs	50	37	10	2
Buying second hand/reconditioned electrical appliances instead of new ones	15	29	51	6
Turning appliances completely off rather than to 'standby' (e.g. TV, stereo)	52	33	14	1
Buying organic food	18	36	41	5
Having showers instead of baths	58	27	14	1
Making fewer journeys by car	66	23	10	1
Eating less meat	14	26	57	3

QUESTION 3 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...?

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
Changing the way I shop cannot really help protect the environment	15	22	14	27	19	3
I feel reasonably well informed about what I could do to be more environmentally friendly	40	40	6	7	5	1
I don't think we are really damaging the environment – it has been exaggerated	12	12	6	20	49	1
The Government does not have the right to make people live in more environmentally friendly ways	18	20	11	24	24	3
I own more possessions than I need	31	26	9	15	17	2
Big chain stores (e.g. Dixons, Boots, Starbucks) are generally better than local shops	18	20	15	25	20	3
Environmentally-friendly products are not as good quality	8	12	20	27	26	7

QUESTION 4 There are a number of things that Government could do to ensure that we protect the environment. To what extent do you think that the following suggestions would be fair or unfair for the Government to introduce?

	Very fair	Quite fair	Not very fair	Not at all fair	N/a
Increasing the price of petrol to reduce the amount we drive	9	19	28	40	3
People who recycle more should pay less council tax and people who don't recycle should be charged more council tax	30	28	18	21	2
There should be lower VAT on energy efficient light bulbs and higher VAT on normal light bulbs	37	36	13	12	2
The Government should ban any food product that damages the environment (e.g. using lots of chemical pesticides) even if this increases the price of food	30	36	19	13	2
People who buy environmentally-friendly or ethical products should earn more 'Reward' or 'Loyalty' points from the store/supermarket	30	40	15	13	3



57% OF PEOPLE AGREE THAT THEY OWN
MORE POSSESSIONS THAN THEY NEED

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