Chapter Nine – Discussion and Recommendations

9 Chapter Nine – Discussion and Recommendations

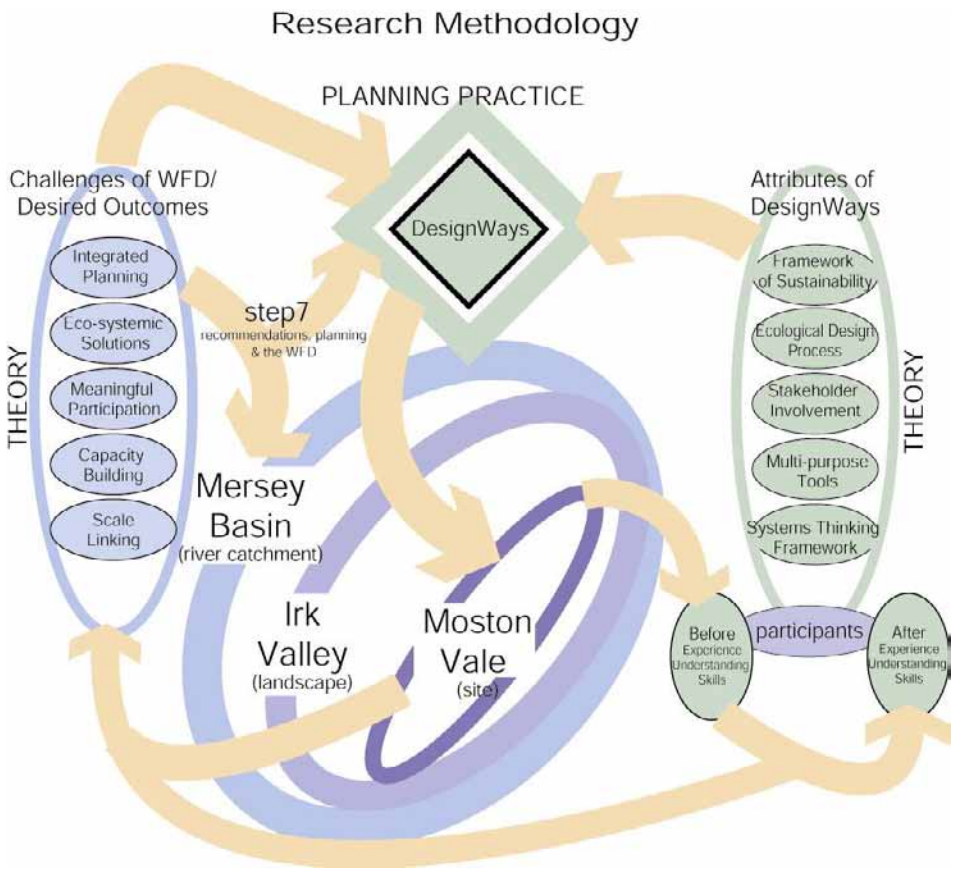
9.1 Introduction

This research tested an integrated approach to participatory planning based on ecological principles. The analysis in the previous two chapters demonstrated that such an approach can help to produce viable plans, which reflect resident and stakeholder aspirations, and help to preserve the ecological attributes and distinctive character of an area. The nature of the process plays an important role in achieving these benefits. As discussed in Chapter 5, however, a methodology for eliciting involvement in planning does not stand on its own. It is embedded in a wider process of stakeholder identification, partnership building, implementation, monitoring and governance.

9.1.1 Structure of this Chapter

This chapter begins by discussing the fourth research question, exploring the operational, institutional and policy implications of this research. A brief summary of decision makers' views of the potential value of the DesignWays approach is followed by an analysis of key factors limiting the delivery of such an integrated approach to active involvement. This leads into a discussion of key features of a holistic planning process. Recommendations are made to improve planning practice, including a description of a possible delivery mechanism for facilitating active involvement in integrated planning at multiple levels of scale. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the fifth research question, exploring the relationship between the research findings and the broader field of systems thinking and ecological design.

Figure 9-1 Research Methodology - Step 7



9.2 Research Question 4 – Operational, institutional and policy implications

In answering the first three research questions, the discussion in Chapter 8 looked at the characteristics of a participatory process that can help to meet the challenges of the WFD. In this section the fourth research question is explored.

Research Question 4. What are the operational, institutional and policy implications of a holistic approach to active involvement in planning?

This research question is answered in four parts. Following the initial analysis of participants' experience of the DesignWays process, the value of the approach from the perspective of key decision makers in the region is explored. This is followed by an exploration of the limiting factors that could impede a broader

deployment of such an approach. This analysis is used to develop a description of an alternative planning process, which would better support an approach such as DesignWays in 'planning for sustainability'. This is followed by recommendations arising from this research. The section concludes with a summary of the discussion in answer to the research question.

9.2.1 Decision makers' assessment of the value of DesignWays approach

Following initial analysis of participants' experience of the DesignWays process and of the outcomes of the process, interviews were conducted with nineteen key decision makers in the NorthWest from a range of sectors (see Table 3-9 on pg. 110 in Chapter 3), in order to test the research findings. All of the interviewees expressed some form of positive reaction to the approach and the findings of the research, and several an interest in further exploring ways of taking forward the types of proposals discussed in a larger scale trial.

The process was seen as potentially useful for a range of agendas. For instance, The *Area Manager LSPs for GO-NW (2004)* said that Local Strategic Partnerships are now being charged with delivering sustainable communities and engaging active participation on an unprecedented scale. She saw that a process such as this, used both to inform Community Strategies and assist with capacity building in the Community Empowerment Networks, could be helpful in delivering outcomes for these agendas. Three interviewees from the Environment Agency could see potential for such an approach in helping to deliver the Water Framework Directive. As the *Ribble Pilot Manager at Environment Agency (2004)* said:

> *"We're not going to be able to deliver some of the finer points of environmental protection without wider active involvement, and the value of your approach is that it allows participants to decide what they want to see happen. I think that's very, very helpful. Yes, I think the way you've included people and brought people with you is good, because it takes people at the speed they feel comfortable moving".*

Interviewees from English Nature and the Lancashire Wildlife Trust (representing the ecology sector) could see the value of the process for their agenda from three perspectives. One perspective was incorporating ecological understanding at the

heart of the process, which could mean that issues such as biodiversity are taken into account in a variety of decision making processes, which were not necessarily focused on environmental concerns. The second was in terms of allowing for an integrated view of an area, in which organisations such as English Nature could provide input about ecological issues, without necessarily leading the participation process, which requires considerable input of resources and skills. Thirdly, encouraging creative exploration of options was valued as a means of developing new ways of thinking, necessary to achieve long-term sustainable development. As the *Chair of North West Biodiversity Forum with English Nature (2004)* said,

> *"If that creative exploration has happened, it's a big achievement, because participants will have left a lot of their ideas behind, and before they know it, they may be discovering new things, then they'd be finding new solutions".*

The *Head of Environment and Sustainable Development at NWDA (2004)* felt that the process could be valuable on the scale of regional park development and regeneration strategies, in particular to *"add value by getting people to think about the interrelationships between social, economic and environmental outcomes, which can be complex".*

The Forestry Commission Newlands Regional Project Officer (2004) was asked to reflect on his experience of planning for the Moston Vale site, following the DesignWays process carried out there. He said:

> *"I think that we have benefited from this planning process. This has been demonstrated by the fact that Groundwork Manchester is further ahead with this project than another Newlands site they are working on. They have a much sounder base for their consultation… I think there are a lot of lessons to be learned from this type of integrated consultation, actively involving people in understanding sustainability… The proposals that have come forward for Moston Vale seem to have a clearer orientation, and are based on a better sense of the existing economic, social and ecological capital, than others being developed without the benefit of this process".*

Whilst many of the reactions were positive, there was also discussion of the factors that could limit the take-up and effective development of such a process. As the *Director of Planning Transport and Sustainability at NWRA (2004)* commented, *"I can see all sorts of potential applications. Part of the problem is thinking about how you*

are going to practically realise them". The major limiting factors are discussed in the following section.

9.2.2 Analysis of limiting factors

Four major themes emerged from the analysis of limiting factors from the participants' perspectives and from the interviews with decision makers. They are discussed in this section, and can be summarised:

- requires time, skill and resources;
- limitations of working to short-term targets and rigid timelines;
- requires attention to democratic legitimacy;
- and requires change of culture and capacity.

9.2.2.1 Requires time, skill and resources

> *"Places where people want to live – and that are sustainable – do not happen by chance. They are the product of visionary thinking and commitment by highly skilled civic and national leaders, developers and professionals, with the full engagement and support of local partners and communities" (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004a, pg. 7).*

Participatory planning requires a commitment of time and energy from community members and stakeholders, which places the onus upon initiating bodies to attempt to make the process meaningful for them, as well as efficient in terms of use of their time and input. This requires careful planning and skilled facilitation to encourage productive dialogue.

Successful participatory processes require input from key stakeholders (in particular from delivery organisations and decision makers), who provide essential information, and are able to listen to ideas emerging from the process and discuss possible ways of delivering them. Such input can be difficult to secure. The planning process in the Irk Valley and Moston Vale would have been strengthened by input from key organisations such as United Utilities and the

Environment Agency. Several reasons why it is difficult for them to provide such input are explored in Section 9.2.2.2 'Limitations of working to short-term targets and rigid timelines'. More involvement of local businesses would have helped to provide information about resource flows, essential to develop the types of eco-industrial clusters envisioned in the plans. Lack of involvement of local businesses has been a common problem in LA21 processes (e.g. Evans and Theobold 2003; Warburton 2002). In the Irk Valley planning process several workshops were tailored to be of relevance to businesses. Further work could be done in this area, in particular looking at ways to encourage business involvement in strategic planning for the area. Given the important role that businesses play in shaping resource flows and managing large areas of land, their participation in planning needs to extend beyond writing the occasional cheque to support the process to a more active role.

In addition to these time requirement for the participation itself, it takes time to develop trust and relationships between different stakeholders and members of the public, and it can be difficult to maintain people's enthusiasm over a long period of time.

Working at more than one level of scale increases the difficulties of coordination. It can be difficult to foster attendance at workshops for both site and landscape levels of scale, due to timetabling difficulties. The site levels of scale workshops tend to be more for community members, who often need to attend workshops in the evening (unless they are retired, unemployed, or able to use the workshops in their jobs or training). Many stakeholders whose 'stake' is derived from their work, however, wish to attend workshops during weekdays.

This mismatch points to the need to attempt to integrate planning processes into schemes that provide benefits for local residents, e.g. job training, and to the need to allow for more than one opportunity to be involved in the planning process. The ability to offer workshops over a longer period of time, in more than one cycle, would also allow community members to see some of the outcomes of the process, which can increase their understanding of its value and hence their desire to participate.

The benefits of active participation in planning were discussed in Chapter 4, and many of these were reiterated in the analysis in Chapters 7 and 8. Engaging such participation does, however, require adequate funding and an allocation of sufficient time to be fully realised. This was recognised in a survey carried out by ODPM:

> *"A 'lack of resources' was ranked the 'most important' problem in implementing participation initiatives by the greatest number of authorities: 190 authorities (88%) ranked this as the most important. A 'lack of time' was ranked the most important problem by almost as many authorities: 177 authorities, that is 82%" (Birch 2002, pg. 41).*

Integrated planning is limited by a lack of up-to-date, easy to use data, e.g. about land use, site ownership, water quality and habitats. Information is often stored in different formats, some paper based and some in GIS. Digitising data and synthesising data from different sources is time consuming. It requires technical expertise and a sound understanding of the underlying properties of the data. Even once the need to integrate data from different (often incompatible) sources is recognised, it can be a difficult problem to solve. Which organisation has the authority to push for coordination? How is a decision reached about which format should be used, bearing in mind the likelihood that organisations will wish to keep their own formats and systems due to familiarity, and the fact that it is time-consuming and costly to change? Who provides the resources to make a changeover? There are concerns about maintaining consistent standards of data integrity and quality over time, as many different organisations collect and manage data.

The HarmoniCOP Project (2003) aims to improve understanding of the practice of public participation in European-wide river basin planning, and to develop *"a basis for the development of improved integrated models and decision support tools".* It is part of the CatchMod Project, which is a cluster of projects looking at Integrated Catchment Water Modelling, with the objective to develop *"common harmonised modelling tools and methodologies for the integrated management of water at river basin or sub-basin scales"* (European Commission 2004). In the NorthWest, the Regional

Intelligence Unit (2004) aims to *"undertake a process of identifying intelligence gaps in the region, in process partnership and consultation with regional players who are members".* Both of these approaches have potential to address the gaps mentioned above, but the problem is still recognised as a major limit to coordination between agencies.

Incompatible boundaries also pose a very real difficulty in terms of coordination, as the administrative boundaries of different organisations are often overlapping and cover different geographical areas. Indeed there are few administrative boundaries in Great Britain that coincide with hydrological catchments. At the time of writing, the Environment Agency is considering four different options for units for stakeholder participation in the River Basin Planning Strategy of the WFD, one of which uses Local Authority boundaries, and thus does not coincide with hydrological catchments (Orr, P. 2004).

Several of the expert interviewees mentioned a lack of skills in both facilitation and understanding the application of principles of sustainability, in particular respondents from the Environment Agency, GO-NW and English Nature. The *Director of Planning Transport and Sustainability at NWRA (2004)* commented, *"There is a limited understanding of sustainable development as a concept and as a real meaningful way of thinking".* These comments echo the findings of the CABE report, *Building Sustainable Communities: Developing the Skills We Need*, which states:

> *"The lack of relevant skills is the single biggest barrier to the development of sustainable communities… in particular, in the discipline of managing community involvement in the design and development processes" (CABE 2003, pg. 3 - 4).*

Whilst the need to *'upskill'* is increasingly recognised, there is still a problem, however, that the need for skill in facilitation is often underestimated. As the *Chief Executive of Lancashire Wildlife Trust and Member of Project Board Ribble Pilot (2004)* commented:

> *"Everyone things it's easy to do facilitation, but I think it is a very underrated skill, not everybody can do it. I think people assume that facilitation will just happen, when actually it is a skill, and it needs to be worked out".*

The CABE report recommended setting up regional centres of excellence for regeneration, which have since been launched (the Chief Executive of the NorthWest centre, Renew, was interviewed for this research in his first week in the post). *The Egan Review - Skills for Sustainable Communities* lists nearly eighty occupations that are involved in the processes of *"planning, delivering and maintaining sustainable communities",* and discusses an urgent need to develop the skills required to deliver sustainable communities in all of these occupations.

9.2.2.2 Limitations of working to short-term targets and rigid timelines

> *"We don't have that option to be consensus–based if we have specific outcomes that we have to adhere to, based on the money that we are getting" (from extensive research into collaboration by the Forestry Service in the US, Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000, pg. 55).*

The benefits of integrated processes and participation tend to accrue in the long term, which is problematic in a climate of increasing pressure for easily measurable short-term indicators of success. The need to meet short-term targets (determined largely by funding requirements and programme assessments) can act as a major barrier to long-term, integrated planning. The *Regional Catchment Estates Manager for United Utilities (2004)* commented on the pressures of time tending to militate against trying innovative solutions, instead prompting "*a return to the way that we understand better, which is; we know what we have got to achieve, and it can be delivered in engineering terms".*

A very common problem cited by decision makers in the interviews was the pressure to work to fixed short-term targets. Indeed a rigid adherence to targets, even environmental ones, was seen to have potentially negative effects, for instance, the *Regional Catchment Estates Manager for United Utilities (2004)* commented:

> *"Large numbers of these improvements in river quality are actually going to have negative impacts on the environment, not just digging holes in the road but substantial increases in energy use (with associated increases*

> *in CO2 emissions) and so on. These negative impacts need to be balanced against the more obvious positive impacts of the proposals".*

He recognised that the next phase of water quality improvements will require a different type of thinking than earlier improvements, which took an obvious approach, such as removing crude sewage discharges from rivers. The need for water quality improvements from more intractable, non-point sources is an impetus for ecological design, as it requires changes in procedures and processes at source, not just 'end of pipe' solutions. They also require a more sophisticated analysis of the ratio of positive to negative impacts on the overall environment, especially when a new water treatment process may require more energy and chemical use to achieve higher water quality standards.

Several interviewees saw a focus on short-term targets as a major driver for planning with a narrow focus. The *Senior Countryside Officer at Countryside Agency (2004)* commented, "*target thinking is divisive and destructive, it forces people to think top-down, and creative thinking goes out the window*". Such top-down thinking can limit meaningful participation. This was recognised by several of the decision makers interviewed, for instance, the *Chair of North West Biodiversity Forum with English Nature (2004)* reflected on this research:

> *"It's a brave thing to do, to go into an open public participation…. because I think that most organisations in the public sector have got an agenda, it's a public agenda, generally developed at the higher level of national government or regional government. So, it's an agenda that's sort of for the public good, but comes down to be delivered, and that comes up against local communities that have different perspectives, different approaches, different values, and so on".*

Several decision makers said they saw the WFD as a *'top-down agenda for action'* and reflected that they felt constrained in public workshops, because,

> *"You are being tasked to ask people what they want to see happen, when all the time you've got an agenda in your back pocket that you are required to see happen" (Ribble Pilot Manager at Environment Agency 2004).*

This was also seen as a potential constraint in terms of fostering integrated work between different agencies. For instance, it was seen as difficult for the Environment Agency to put time and resources into a holistic planning process

that was not specifically designed to focus on their priorities, due to the pressures they are under to deliver improvements in these areas.

Indeed, as one participant (a planner with considerable experience of City Council politics) noted, by going through a process like this it may even emerge that a project, as originally devised, is not necessarily the best way to deliver the desired benefits, *"So sometimes you start off with a project like this [Moston Vale] and you realise that it shouldn't be this project, it should be something else" (Environmental Strategy Officer at City Council 2003a).*

Having a holistic perspective increases the difficulty of *"deriving satisfactory output measures",* and assigning them to particular targets, than a less integrated approach (a finding echoed in research into reclaiming derelict land, discussed in Handley 2001, pg. 144). Encouraging a holistic planning process requires changes in the way that projects are planned, and success is measured. This factor is recognised in planning literature, with a target orientated approach described as *"colonisation… by the requirement that essential processes are undertaken in auditable ways…[which has tended to] over hasty measurement of the wrong things"* (Taylor 2000, pg. 1024 - 1025). It is also important to include qualitative assessment of success, as the *Regional Catchment Estates Manager for United Utilities (2004)* reflected, the process of attempting to meet European Directives *"drives us to just dealing with numbers and forgetting what those numbers represent".*

Setting strategic targets is still important. For instance, discussing targets the *Chair of North West Biodiversity Forum with English Nature (2004)* commented, *"[plans need] to be informed by species and habitats, their distribution, their rarity, their significance in the world, which is a bit of a specialised agenda".* The challenge lies in encouraging a two-way flow of information, with bottom-up participation informing targets, whilst issues of strategic importance at the international, national and regional levels inform planning at landscape and local levels. Strategic issues should be discussed in relation to local priorities in the planning process.

The need to involve participants early in the process in the actual design of plans is not always recognised by funders and policy makers. This experience is reflected in the Netherlands, where there has been a long experience of engaging public participation in planning, but *"actual involvement of stakeholders*

in design activities is rare" (Enserink and Monnikhof 2003, pg. 316). Participants on this planning process expressed concern that because ecological design is not a commonly used process, and it requires more time than applying boilerplate solutions, it is unlikely to be taken up by developers and regeneration schemes without incentives.

This difficulty is compounded by inflexible funding deadlines, where time for participation and integrated planning has not been included in the delivery timetable. This point was emphasised by the *Operations Manager at Red Rose Forest (2001)* [70]:

> *"It is often the time scale that stops plans from being as good as they could be, because you are often asked to present something within the next two weeks if you want to get the money, and unless you have been doing something for the last six months… sort of on spec, you won't have engaged participation in the plans that goes in for a proposal".*

There is often pressure to spend the money on implementation quickly, and to a rigid timeline. The rush to spend money often leads to sub-optimal planning once funding is secured, especially if there has not been dialogue in advance to decide priorities. As the *Environmental Team Leader at GO-NW (2004)* stated, *"Grass roots participation is not efficient".* It is difficult to trammel the timelines of participation to annual spending cycles.

Whilst there is wide recognition of the fact that integrated planning can save money in the long term (e.g. Martin, Steve and Pearce 1993, pg. 220; World Bank 1994), this research suggests that there are still very real pressures on project officers and decision makers to deliver short-term targets, which can make it difficult for them to take a holistic perspective. This finding was echoed in the author's previous research into 'planning for sustainability' in the context of the Mersey Basin Campaign (Tippett, J. 2002).

[70] It should be noted that this respondent is now the Forestry Commission Regional Newlands Project Officer, and is working with the project to enable more innovative engagement techniques to be used in the regeneration of Derelict and Underused Land. Indeed, the Newlands Project sponsored the planning process for Moston Vale as a trial of innovative processes.

9.2.2.3 Requires attention to democratic legitimacy

> *"The politics of sustainability are the politics of social and political change generally… Connected to all this is the unleashing of more participatory democracy, visioning procedures and deliberative institutions. The global economic order is under review, as are the constitutional structures of national political power and regional devolution" (O'Riordan 2000b, pg. 60).*

In participatory planning a lack of engagement on behalf of various sectors and stakeholders can act as a detriment to democratic ideals, promoting instead democracy by those who are able, and wish, to attend (e.g. Whittaker and Hutchcroft 2002). Two of the decision makers interviewed discussed the possibility of the results of participation being skewed by attendance of particular interest groups, or of residents with a commitment to the status quo.

Engaging sufficiently wide representation in participatory planning is a common difficulty. Particular attention needs to be paid to the inclusion of hard-to-reach groups, which may require innovative outreach methods and attention to appropriate communication. Several interviewees mentioned the need to make efforts to engage with participants beyond the *'usual suspects'*, whilst recognising the difficulty of doing so. Working with existing programmes can help to engage a broader representation of people, building upon the trust and networks built by their activities.

When using the DesignWays process the aim is to encourage participation from as wide a spectrum of stakeholders as possible. The toolkit has been designed so that it can be used in an existing partnership, utilising the social capital and networks in the organisation, or so that it can be used to catalyse the development of such partnerships. The categories of the EASEL prompt participants to broaden their idea of who should be involved, which can lead to further organisations and individuals being invited to participate. Developing networks and including stakeholders in planning needs to be an ongoing endeavour, recognising that as the process unfolds, more will be learned about the area and possibilities for developing synergies between different organisations (Water Framework

Directive Policy Advisor (seconded from United Utilities to MBC) 2004). The planning process itself should be designed to be enjoyable and inclusive. Methods used to streamline the process and enable productive dialogue between participants, helping them to see that their time is being well used, were discussed in Section 8.3.1 ‘Challenge 3 - Encouraging meaningful participation’ on pg. 340.

Similar to ‘Enquiry by Design’ and ‘Future Search’ exercises (discussed in Chapter 5), this DesignWays process was not part of a statutory requirement to consult, but rather an opportunity to engage in envisioning within a partnership structure. Speaking of ‘Future Search’ Conferences used as part of LA21, O'Riordan (2003, pg. 17) highlighted a potential problem with such activities:

> *“This kind of exercise is largely disconnected from political reality and effective delivery. So only the most committed, virtually professional, consultees get involved”.*

The type of participation discussed in this thesis involves stakeholders and community members actively developing ideas and options for plans. At present, consultants or agency experts often do this, in a top-down process, sometimes taking into account concerns raised in consultation. Stakeholders and community members are then invited to comment on the options.

Several participants recognised that a potential value of a wider engagement in developing options could reduce the time spent in ‘inadvertent participation’, when stakeholders and community members protest against options. Reflecting on his long experience in the public sector, the *Environmental Team Leader at GO-NW (2004)* said: *“A very common problem is that the community feels that if they are not engaged early enough, their only path is to say, no, we don't like it, no, we don't want it to happen”.* Discussing the DesignWays approach, the Director of Planning Transport and Sustainability at NWRA (2004) commented, *“This is a way of avoiding problems later on in the process”,* but recognised that *“you can do all of this and still end up with the two people who don't like it, causing problems later on”.*

Discussing a situation in which a few vociferous members of the public had impeded progress for a considerable period on a project that the Environment Agency was undertaking, the *Strategic Environmental Planning Officer at Environment Agency (2004)* reflected, however, that a more active process of engagement early

in the process might have lead to better understanding of the options on behalf of the community. This could have promoted a more productive dialogue about the pros and cons of the project, leading to an earlier resolution of the concerns than one in which the participation was *after* the project had been designed.

Active engagement should also be supported and informed by wider consultation and outreach, accepting that not all parties wish to be, or can be, actively involved to such a level. This wider outreach can allow for a valuable testing of ideas from a broader field of participants. In the case of Moston Vale, Groundwork has carried out a broader consultation on the options developed using the DesignWays approach. Engaging stakeholders in developing the options does not remove the need for transparent and democratic processes for deciding which options to take forward from a participatory planning process.

It is difficult to engage sufficient representation of key decision makers in a participatory process such as DesignWays (as was the case in this research, though several representatives from North Manchester Partnerships and the Newlands Project did attend at least one workshop). It is important to try and engage project beneficiaries, decision makers *and* the people responsible for implementation in such planning processes. Speaking of an *'implementation deficit'* in many planning processes, Williams (2002, pg. 201) suggests, *"the rational model's separation of formulation and implementation [of strategic plans] is a contributory factor".* In the DesignWays process in the Irk Valley project officers, who are the stakeholders likely to implement the plans, were involved in all aspects of the design. Working with community members allowed them opportunities to discuss possibilities for community involvement in implementation.

The potential for democracy by 'those that wish to turn up' is influenced by people's cynicism and sense that there is no point in being involved in participation, as it does not have an effect on decision making. This problem is exacerbated when engaging participation in planning at a larger level of scale, where the issues are complex and abstract, and change is slow. Integrating landscape scale planning with planning at the very local, or site, level can help to increase interest in the planning process, as well as developing some aspects of a plan that can be taken forward quickly. This helps to build trust and generates

interest in further planning efforts. In this research community members said that it was important for them to have an opportunity to talk to project officers and planners, in order to gain a better understanding of their work and the limitations of what they are able to deliver. Participatory processes that are attended by decision makers and delivery organisations can help to reduce a sense of cynicism, as participants feel their concerns and aspirations have been listened to.

Altshuler (1965a; 1965b) wrote a critique of comprehensive planning in the mid 60s. One of the issues he wrote about was the lack of potential for comprehensive planning to coordinate actions, due to the fact that planners do not have the power to *enforce* cooperation. More recent collaborative planning efforts have not relied on such a top-down approach to implement plans. This shift was partly influenced by critiques of the concept of power as existing in particular positions and institutions, with the realisation of the ability of players to enact *"complex relations of power"* through everyday actions (Forester 2000, pg. x.). This shift was influenced by Foucault's (1979, pg. 29) painstaking studies into the relations of power. Instead of seeing power as an entity, he says, *"power is exercised rather than possessed".* It was also a response to changing models of governance, and the emerging emphasis on partnerships and networks to deliver some of the policy objectives of government (e.g. Rhodes 2001).

A pragmatic approach to eliciting change through collaborative planning was demonstrated in several case studies analysed by Innes (1996, pg. 467), prompting this reflection:

> *"Planning through consensus building did achieve coordination, but through a horizontal and self-managing process rather than a top-down exercise of power. People chose this method in situations where no-one had the power to accomplish objectives alone".*

Such emergent coordination cannot be predicted in advance, which means that it can be difficult to devote time to the processes that encourage it to develop, given the need for certainty in terms of predicting outcomes from actions, discussed in Section 9.2.2.4 'Requires change of culture and capacity'.

Van der Helm (2003, pg. 6) reminds us that influence on decision making processes does not necessarily mean that the process needs to have *'official legitimacy'*. Influence can be exerted in less direct ways, as with the World Water Vision, which has become a reference point for international discussions of water policy. On an individual level, as participants are able to develop their understanding of decision making, and the impact of their activities on the environment, through engaging in a participatory planning process, they are better equipped to question decisions and to make changes in their spheres of influence. If stakeholders are able to develop connections between their different areas of work and interest during the process, this social capital can also provide an alternative locus of change, albeit not necessarily a direct influence on official decision making.

There are circumstances when locating a participatory process outside official decision making processes is valuable. The Western Australia Planning Commission has facilitated several 'Enquiry by Design' workshops, initiated by local government departments or major landowners. From this experience they suggest the fact that these workshops are *'typically non-binding'*, encourages *"participants to think creatively, to step outside the, sometimes limiting, constraints of their formal roles, and provide the flexibility to consider and debate a wide range of options"* (Western Australian Planning Commission 2003b section Urban Design and Major Places, Enquiry-by-Design Workshops, para. 1).

Research into participatory planning processes by the Centre for the Study of Environmental Change in Lancaster University has also found that processes that are not *'plugged in'* to official decision making can allow for more creative discussion of options (discussed in O'Riordan 1999a). The processes tested in this research started out not 'plugged in' to official decision making, but were seen as an opportunity for exploration of possibilities in the area. The outcomes demonstrate, however, that it is possible for participatory processes to create their own dynamic of interest from decision makers. As the Forestry Commission saw the plan was viable and seemed to have engendered a level of local enthusiasm, the Moston Vale site became one of two sites for the first phase of the Newlands

funding stream (according to several key players it moved up the priority list in part because of the work that had been done in this planning process).

At least one local Councillor who was initially sceptical, and in fact tried to put a halt to the process, now talks of the process in positive terms in meetings. One of the reasons given by this Councillor for his reservations about engaging participation was a concern about raising residents' expectations, which could lead to disappointment and frustration through encouraging unrealistic hopes.

The concern about raising expectations is a real one, as the *Chief Executive of Renew (2004)* commented:

> *"Cynicism in the community is largely because they have been promised things in the past that haven't been delivered. That's why being very upfront about what the parameters are from the start is so important. I think this is partly why some New Deal for Communities Partnerships have run into such difficulties, because so many of them were presented in the wrong way. It was presented as: 'Here is fifty million pounds for you, the community, to spend in your area'. Of course it wasn't. What Government wanted was for the community to be seriously engaged in it and deciding how to spend it, but actually the money is spent by an accountable body within given parameters on behalf of a wide partnership".*

Hopes were very low in the Moston Vale area, reflected in this rather plaintive comment during an interview, *"I hope we see something happening in my lifetime".* In the planning process it was re-emphasised at every step that there were no promises of money for implementation. The Councillor who had been very sceptical about the process in the beginning was later able to see the advantages of this more considered approach to consultation, in the constructive attitude participants took explaining their hopes for the future following the process.

Discussing 'Institutions for Global Environmental Change' in the wake of the United Nations General Assembly special session on sustainable development (UNGASS) in 1997, Jordan and Voisey (1998, pg. 97) reflected, *"sustainability requires changes to deeply rooted modes of political behaviour".* Discussing the frequent lack of influence of participatory processes on decision making, Oels (2003, pg. 70) suggests that there is a *"need for a change in formal structures of governance in*

order to provide an effective interface for the informal processes of participation". In this early stage of the development of deliberative and inclusionary processes O'Riordan (1999b, pg. 4) suggests, *"participatory and representative democracies do not mix well".* Careful thought needs to go into this relationship, to develop mechanisms to allow them to co-evolve, building on each other's strengths.

The social learning that can occur in participatory planning *can* help to improve communication between elected officials and the public, but this will require a willingness on behalf of the officials to learn new ways of communicating and deliberating about options. A difficulty encountered during this process was residents' distrust of the Council. Several participants mentioned that they were glad the Councillors weren't at the meetings, as they tend to take over, and people wouldn't say what they wanted to say if they *were* there.

In this research the North Manchester strategic vision, which will in part decide areas of housing to be demolished, and as such touches on many an emotive issues, was to be taken out to consultation in the summer following the DesignWays process. There were fears that the DesignWays process would be seen as part of this strategic vision, which led to a request to change the name of the workshops, to remove the phrase 'Landscape Visions' and replace it with something more vague, 'Creative Futures'. Despite the efforts of several of the participants on the workshop to use the information in the subsequent strategic envisioning process, there was still a lack of awareness of the need for such a holistic view, and a distrust of using information that wasn't gathered for the vision itself.

Such a lack of willingness to engage with different processes, and use the information gathered in them, a 'not invented here' syndrome, can hinder integrated planning. It can also increase the likelihood of consultation fatigue, as participants feel they are being asked again to provide similar information. In the workshops for Moston Vale the author ensured that information gathered about the site from a previous consultation by the Community Technical Aid Centre

(2001) was incorporated into the design process, and that community members were aware of this[71].

For a process with a broad base of participation to be effective, there needs to be a transparent decision making structure. This involves being clear about where and with whom the ability to make decisions lies, what the criteria for selection are, and what the opportunities for participation and feedback are. Such clarity is difficult to achieve in practice. Confusion about decision making structures is often exacerbated by changes in programmes and personnel in charge of them.

One participant on the DesignWays process commented that solutions that emerge from a participatory process such as DesignWays might not be *politically* acceptable, even if they are seen as 'sustainable'. Discussing this issue, and the process of deciding which projects make 'sense' the *Conservation Officer - Mersey with English Nature (2004)* commented:

> *"Makes sense to whom? That is the question. Who decides that? The outcomes of a participatory process may be, 'we don't think this [particular project] is a good idea, and a lot of times you are talking about Local Authorities that are putting in projects that they are interested in, and they have a slightly different take on these things".*

He went on to talk about the possibility of clashes between priorities at different levels of scale, for instance, where a Local Authority may wish a particular project to happen as it would have beneficial impacts on the local area, but which may not be seen as having beneficial outcomes for the region.

This echoes concerns that the meaning of sustainability is at times obfuscated for political ends (e.g. Rydin 2003, pg. 2). A participant on the DesignWays process reflected on the value of teaching participants the TNS system conditions and using them in an open and visual process: *"It is clear to see what the connections are. You couldn't stop people in the group pointing out those connections, either. Even if some people didn't see, somebody else might see it" (Environmental Strategy Officer at City Council 2003a).*

[71] The contact list in the report was used to inform all the former participants of the DesignWays process, the ideas summarised in the report from the questionnaires sent to 1,200 households were written onto 'leaves', clearly marked with the origin. These were then introduced into the envisioning process, after the participants had an initial opportunity to brainstorm new ideas, and were used to stimulate further dialogue about options for the area.

It could be argued that teaching the TNS principles as part of the process imposes a scientific framework on local understandings. Communicative planning theorists have challenged the view that the public need to be educated in scientific ways of thinking (e.g. Innes 1995; Petts 1997). This challenge to the need for education in scientific thinking follows Habermas's approach as a *'bottom-up situationist'*, in which *"what is right and true in a given communicative process is determined solely by the participants in that process"* (Flyvbjerg 2001, pg. 91).

Recognising that *"all forms of knowledge are socially constructed"* (Healey 1997, pg. 29), including scientific knowledge, it is seen as important in DesignWays not to present TNS as an agreed definition of the 'truth'. Participants are encouraged to relate their own experiences and values to the framework. Several different ways of approaching the same knowledge are used. Contrasting a *'transfer of knowledge'* paradigm with one in which a space is created *"to provide conditions where understandings can emerge".* McClintock et al (2003, pg. 723 - 724) stated, *"if understandings do change, then that can be considered as an emergent property of engaging in a process".* As discussed in Chapter 7, the use of an educational framework of sustainability does not imply that this model is transferred to participants; rather it is used as a starting point for dialogue, from which they develop their own understandings.

O'Riordan (1998, pg. 109) reminds us that civic science, involving all interested parties, *"is also a form of empowerment in its own right, and hence a crucial part of the new democratic process".* In the DesignWays process dialogue about the nature of 'scientific knowledge' is encouraged. Participants draw maps of their area to show what they think is important, and relate these to scientific and technical information through discussion. They are encouraged to define what *they* see as assets and problems, allowing development of a plan that reflects local knowledge about the area. The analysis of this process suggests that participants enjoy learning new ideas and being viewed as capable of understanding at scientific information, as long as this is done in a way which respects their knowledge and experience.

Flyvbjerg (2001, pg. 14) has stated, *"Power has a clear tendency to dominate rationality in the dynamic and overlapping relationship*

between the two". The structure of the DesignWays toolkit is seen as a guide for opening up new lines of inquiry, and enhancing the possibility for participants to move beyond readily accepted definitions of possible and desirable trajectories for development.

The potential for participation processes to legitimate forgone conclusions, and to further entrench existing inequalities was discussed in Chapter 5 in Section 5.7.1 'Critique of participation in planning' on pg. 174. The limiting factors discussed in Section 9.2.2.2 'Limitations of working to short-term targets and rigid timelines' highlight the need to cultivate awareness of the many different facets of power and manipulation possible in engaging participation in planning. No toolkit can substitute for cultivating an awareness of power relations, what Forester (2000, pg. 130) terms a *"transformative theory of social learning",* which includes an exploration of how the practitioner changes through practice. This requires an openness to learn, an acceptance of different viewpoints, sensitivity to new ideas, and willingness to admit to mistakes on behalf of the initiators and facilitators of the process[72]. Different aspects of the need to change the culture of planning and to develop the capacity of those involved in it are discussed in the next section.

9.2.2.4 Requires change of culture and capacity

> *"We need people with the ability to think and work outside their traditional compartments, who can bring together disparate organisations and interests to help deliver the common goal. This will require new skills and new ways of thinking and acting from all those involved in delivery" (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004a, pg. 29).*

Several of the decision makers interviewed mentioned a *'silo culture'* as a major limiting factor. There was a general feeling that whilst the rhetoric of sustainable

[72] An example of this need arose in the author's work in South Africa, when participants on a two-week permaculture course were upset by being offered the typical certificate for a Permaculture Design Course, labelled as a '72 hour' course. The label '72 hour' sparked memories of apartheid, and the fact that non-whites without a pass caught outside of the homelands received a stamp, which said they had 72 hours to leave the area or be jailed. We changed the label to 'two-week'. Since then she has tried to ask, 'Is there anything particularly important or sensitive I need to know about in this area?', and to ask a local person to inform her if they see that she is treading in sensitive areas.

development is increasingly heard, there is still a lack of they type of integrated thinking it will require. There was recognition that this is not an easy shift to make, even when there is an awareness of the need to do so, for example:

> *"There are so many groups and organisations all basically saying the same thing, even the same people moving around the same circuit, saying the same thing but not actually pulling it all together" (Strategic Environmental Planning Officer at Environment Agency 2004).*

The number of partnership and participatory initiatives has proliferated over the last several years. Several of the decision makers mentioned that it is a crowded field. Competition for scarce resources is intense, and it is an understandable behaviour for organisations to closely guard their projects and programmes, which can impede working with other organisations to determine strategic priorities for an area. The *Director of Planning Transport and Sustainability at NWRA (2004)* recognised that competition for resources can also militate against spending resources on stakeholder and community engagement. Discussing a possible lack of willingness to commit resources to participatory processes, he summarised a potential attitude of funders:

> *"It's taking money, it's taking time and effort… We need to spend the money on the project, not holding the workshops, which will only tell us what we are doing wrong".*

In a multi-agency partnership it is important to pay attention to political relationships and the details of communications, e.g. needing to place logos in the correct order on invites and promotional material, and to circulate drafts of reports and invites several times, especially to partners that have donated money. There are often rivalries and tensions between agencies, and in partnership working it is important to attempt to give credit to all parties and be aware of some of these possible tensions. This finding was echoed in the authors' research into the partnership working of the Mersey Basin Campaign (Tippett, J. 2001).

Even the starting point of a planning process can cause tensions in terms of areas of interest. The practical difficulties faced by organisations in terms of putting time and resources into an integrated process, which is not specifically designed to meet their objectives, was discussed above. There is also a cultural barrier to such cooperation. As the *Chief Executive of Renew (2004)* commented on the

DesignWays process, *"You started from an ecological point of view, so there is all that sort of power relationships between the different interests involved".*

A cultural shift to support a more integrated approach has to happen at two levels, both at the top managerial levels and on behalf of the operational staff. Several of the decision makers interviewed said that they felt it would require more trust of operational workers from the top levels of decision making, to allow decisions to be made at a more devolved level.

The requirement for predictive certainty, for the organisations interviewed to predict precisely what the outcomes of their programmes and projects will be, was seen as a limiting factor related to the need to devolve decision making powers to lower levels. As the *Regional Catchment Estates Manager for United Utilities (2004)* noted, *"Some of these sorts of solutions [such as reed beds] actually require a willingness to accept uncertainty".*

Ecological and social systems cannot be fully described and understood merely from a description of the interaction of their parts. Recent controversies surrounding the concept of global climate change and the nature of trans-national pollution effects and delayed synergistic reactions have further underscored the impossibility of absolute certainty in science. This realization is not restricted to the natural sciences. Barnes and Bloor (1982, pg. 46) state, *"the rationalist goal of producing pieces of knowledge that are both universal in their credibility and justified in context-independent terms is unattainable".* Stringer (1999, pg. 48) suggests that positivist scientific methodologies are appealing, as they hold out the possibility of control. He suggests that managerial culture revolves around concepts of *'accountability'* and *'performance indicators'*. Thus, concepts of being able to measure social trends precisely and predict behaviours appeal to *"people in managerial or political positions whose performance is judged by their ability to control social contexts for which they are held responsible".* Despite this attraction, the limits of such positivist modelling in providing accurate and sufficient descriptions of social reality are increasingly recognised both in academia and policy (e.g. Miles and Huberman 1994; Naveh and Lieberman 1994; Savory and Butterfield 1999; Senge 1990).

Without an understanding at managerial and policy setting levels of the value of integrated approaches, it is difficult for project officers to justify time and resources spent on a process that may not deliver direct, measurable benefits (especially in the short term). For instance, two Groundwork Community Link Officers started the DesignWays process for the Irk Valley, but were told that they could not continue with the workshops, as they did not help them to meet their project-based targets. This decision was made despite the fact that they both worked in the Manchester area and felt it would offer them important training in participatory processes. Even once the process was started, the IVP Project Officer had to withstand some pressure to call it to a halt, as its value was not recognised in the early stages.

Several RVI Coordinators said they felt they were not able to attend the workshops, even though they themselves felt they would be useful, as they required time away from the work they were supposed to be doing. The difficulty of justifying an integrated approach that might not directly deliver results was also seen as a barrier by several RVI Coordinators in terms of promoting the use of DesignWays in their own project areas. This increased the difficulty of finding a project on which to test the DesignWays approach in this research.

A limiting factor for engaging broader participation in planning is also that experts may feel nervous about inviting lay people to come up with ideas in their area of expertise, either because the solutions may be of low quality, or because it threatens their sense of professional worth (e.g. Enserink and Monnikhof 2003). It is recognised, however, that the attitude *"we know best is always subject to challenge, and is now increasingly subject to challenge" (Director of Planning Transport and Sustainability at NWRA 2004).* Several participants mentioned a concern that some stakeholders and project officers may feel that the non-traditional methods of an innovative process like DesignWays were threatening, or beneath their dignity. It is a recognised problem that 'experts' may feel threatened by being asked to consider lay people's knowledge (e.g. Reed and Brown 2003). The nature of the process may exacerbate this perception, as several of the exercises may appear childish (e.g. drawing pictures and using Mind Maps).

Capacity building implies learning, which implies a degree of effort. A lack of attention to learning the skill of *how* to design can be exacerbated by a desire for

quick answers and short project timelines. A syndrome of complacency, e.g. 'We are already doing 'planning for sustainability', or 'We are already delivering participatory planning', can also impede the willingness to learn unfamiliar skills.

In addition to skill, effective deployment of a participatory toolkit requires careful consideration of how to tailor it to the particular context. This implies both attention to the needs and interest of the participants and an understanding of the reasoning behind the process, so that it can be adapted without losing its essential essence. This may need to be done 'on the fly' during workshops, requiring a degree of flexibility on behalf of the facilitator. The DesignWays toolkit cannot be used effectively without training, preferably in a context of practice, so that facilitators are offered support as they learn to use it in different contexts.

It has to be recognised that it is not easy to stand up in front of a mixed group and to facilitate a participatory process. It requires confidence and a thick enough skin to be able to not take participants' potential disgruntlement too personally. There are often participants who come to workshops with particular grievances. It requires tact, and sometimes forcefulness, to prevent them from dominating a conversation, not matter how well designed the process. It is also important to maintain a high level of enthusiasm. The attitude of the facilitator was mentioned as an important factor during the 'after' interviews with participants. This was emphasised by one resident:

> *"I think a lot of that [ability to input on behalf of community members] was down to the atmosphere that you created. There was no stress and no worries and no feeling I've got to get this right. It was easy going, and I don't think it would have occurred to anybody that to think 'I might put my foot in it and look a fool' because you hadn't created that kind of atmosphere" (Chair MVRA 2003).*

Social learning requires ongoing development. A common limiting factor with many efforts to develop capacity is a lack of follow up due to lack of resources. In addition, low job security due to lack of consistent funding means that project officers are often not in their posts for long, thus continuity and capacity are diminished. For example, the IVP Project Officer has left his post since the workshops were carried out for this research. It can also be difficult for participants to consolidate learning and maintain enthusiasm when they return to

their usual contexts, especially if other people they work with have not experienced a similar social learning experience.

Change will require an awareness of the value of considering sustainability issues at all levels of an organisation. One participant commented on a change in management that allowed him to take part in the planning process for the Irk Valley, *"My previous boss… thought it was too green and airy fairy and didn't deal with the real issues of hard decisions of the city".*

Speaking of applying systems thinking to real-world problem solving, Ackoff (2003) stresses the need to be able to make mistakes, and to learn from them. Changes in planning process such as those described in this thesis will require staff to be willing to admit to mistakes and to discuss potential learning in new areas, which is not always a comfortable process. As the *Environmental Team Leader at GO-NW (2004)* commented, this requires *"people with skills to lead people through that pain barrier... It's got to connect up and so that you are not simply creating more and more problems".* He recognised the fact that going through the DesignWays process *"could actually lead to the basic assumptions that you came with being radically altered as a result of it. That doesn't often happen. Consultation doesn't often lead to actual changes".* Questioning the underlying assumptions of particular programmes can seem threatening for people whose jobs are reliant on timely delivery of projects and meeting of targets.

A need for flexibility and allowance for mistakes can be politically problematic. Discussing systems and operational research in health action zones White (2003, pg. 314) comments, *"the present government's commitment to 'bottom-up' initiatives and local experimentation may be at odds with its strong centralizing instinct and continuing insistence on 'zero tolerance' of failure"*.

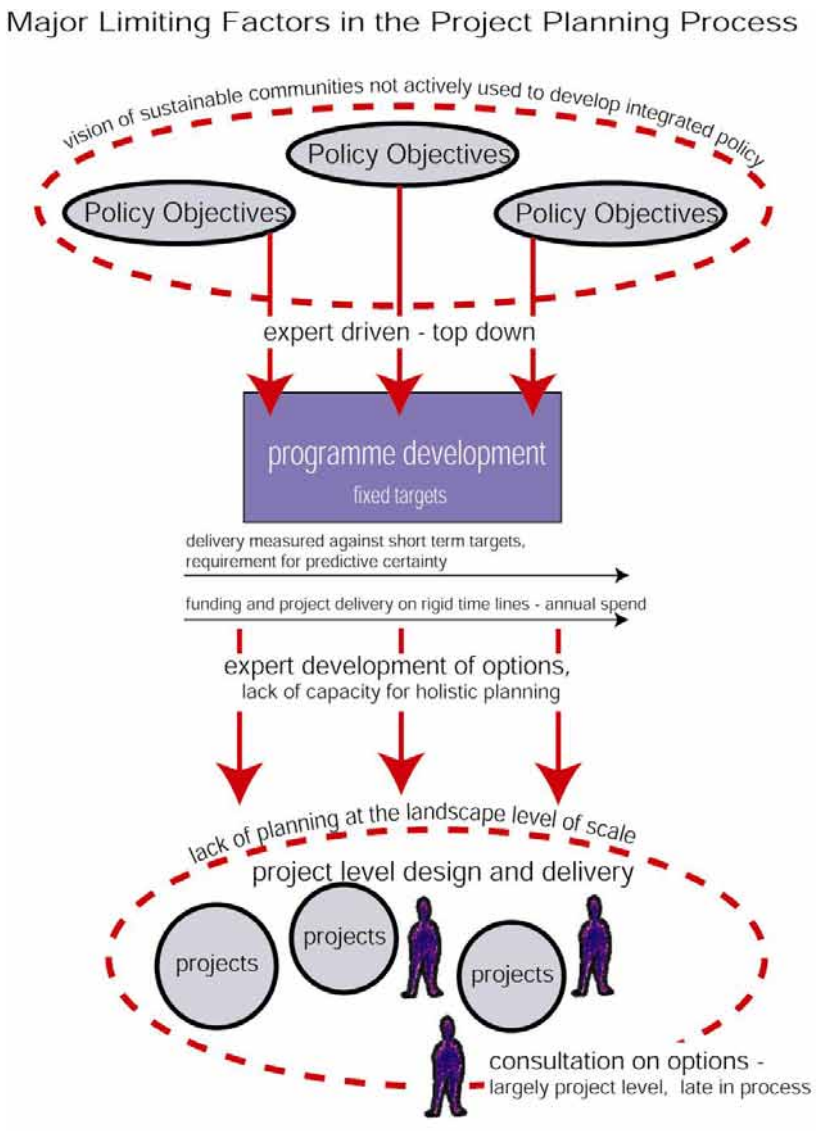
Change needs to be supported from directors and key people in the higher ranks of organisations, helping to create a culture in which admission of mistakes is seen as not only acceptable, but a necessary part of learning. An attitude of 'zero tolerance of failure' needs to be replaced with zero tolerance of rigid attitudes and lack of learning. It is an encouraging sign that *The Egan Review* suggests job applicants for the proposed National Centre for Sustainable Community Skills must have at least one failure from which they have learned.

9.2.2.5 Summary of limiting factors

Figure 9-2 shows a distillation of the key limiting factors that emerged as barriers to a broad application of an integrated approach to active involvement with many different sectors and the public. This diagram represents a simplified version of the limiting factors in the current planning and decision making structure elucidated above. It has to be recognised that this is an extreme version of the limits of the existing system. There is a growing understanding of the limitations of such a model, and there are shifts towards a more integrated view. There are several examples of alternative models, such as those demonstrated by Hampshire County Council in the Test Valley Community Landscape Project[73] and the Newlands Project[74]. Interviews with key decision makers and the experience of the participants on this process suggest, however, that there are still very real pressures that militate against a more holistic approach to 'planning for sustainability'.

[73] In the Test Valley members' of the public perceptions of landscape values were used to inform Landscape Character Assessment. This was a wide ranging process, which developed links between rural and urban communities and involving the public in strategic decision making (Carman 2004).
[74] In the Newlands Project the Public Benefit Recording System is used to determine strategic priorities for landscape regeneration from several different aspects, including social benefit, landscape value and economic regeneration (Newlands 2003b).

Figure 9-2 Summary of key limiting factors



9.2.3 Holistic planning process

The above analysis points to the potential value of an approach such as DesignWays, as well as several important limiting factors that can act as a barrier to its use in the conventional project planning process. In this section an alternative approach to 'planning for sustainability' is developed.

The use of the word holistic, as opposed to integrated, is deliberate. It stems from taking an explicit systems view of the decision making process. Savory and Butterfield (1999) describe the difference between an integrated and a holistic approach. In an integrated approach several different disciplines look at a problem from their perspective, and attempt to forge connections between the different areas of interest.

In a holistic decision making process, it is seen as important to *start* from a holistic perspective, from systems principles and goals, attempting to get at the root of what it is we want to see conserved and created, and *then* look at the contributions of the different disciplines to achieving that. It involves an attempt to go beyond treating symptoms, and instead thinking in terms of dynamic systems, long-term social goals, and the essential role of ecosystems in sustaining all human wealth.

This distinction has parallels in a discussion of the difference between multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity in O'Riordan (2000a, pg. 16), in which *"true interdisciplinarity is seen as a fundamentally unique approach to total science"*. It involves the *"merging of knowledge into common concepts and the application of ideas in the round for real-world problem solving".*

In the DesignWays approach a holistic perspective is developed from melding common principles of ecological systems, the system conditions of The Natural Step, the system of human needs developed by Max-Neef (1991a) and the shared aspirations and goals of participants' into a tool for decision making. The need for a change in the way we make decisions, despite our increased knowledge of environmental destruction, was highlighted by Savory (1999, para. 11):

> *"Today the US, which boasts more environmental scientists than any nation, now exports more eroding soil annually than all its other exports combined, in terms of both value and tonnage".*

He highlights the need to move beyond a linear decision making process to a holistic one. A key finding of this research is that whilst increased participation *can* provide multiple benefits for environmental planning, the form of the participation matters, in particular, the process of design and decision making within that participation.

The first response that the *Regional Catchment Estates Manager for United Utilities (2004)* made to the presentation of the key findings of this research was: *"That would change the way we make decisions!".* He went on to reflect:

> *"You can see that such change is fundamental, it requires dramatic amounts of work and complete changes in the ways that we think, to think more widely. Having said that, the Water Framework Directive offers you that opportunity".*

Whilst there was considerable discussion of the limits to an integrated approach in the interviews, the decision makers also recognised that there is a real potential for major shifts in this direction. This comes from both a growing awareness of the value of such an approach, such as exemplified in the growing awareness of the need for iteration between policies, plans, projects and programmes in a *'strategic approach to derelict land reclamation'* (Department of the Environment 1992). In addition, recent shifts in policy require a more active participation of stakeholders and community members in planning, such as in the Water Framework Directive (European Commission 2000) and in Planning Policy Statement Number 1 (Office of the Deputy Prime Minster 2004). The *Strategic Environmental Planning Officer at Environment Agency (2004)* commented:

> *"Certainly in the last twelve months there seems to be an understanding, amongst a lot of the organisations that actually you are far better working together".*

A more holistic way of planning and decision making aims to:

- avoid actions that work against the long-term vision of stakeholders and residents;

- and target efforts and expenditure towards achieving the long-term vision.

The DesignWays process aims to develop a positive vision for future possibilities. This includes developing a mutual vision that is commonly understood and shared, with broad and ambitious goals. This vision is then used to test decisions, to ask whether a particular change is likely to achieve the long-term vision. The value of developing such a future vision has been recognised in two of the key policy messages in Planning Policy Statement 1:

- *"the need for positive planning to achieve sustainable development objectives and proactive management of development, rather than simply regulation and control;*

- *and the need for plans to set clear visions for communities and help to integrate the wide range of activities relating to development and regeneration" (Office of the Deputy Prime Minster 2004).*

The *Chief Executive of Renew (2004)* recognised the potential of the new emphasis on Sustainable Communities for overcoming rivalries between different agencies and fostering more integrated thinking:

> *"I think that the issue of sustainable communities, provided the government sticks with it long enough, does provide a way of looking at all of this afresh. If you dig under that concept at all it must be sustainable because it is lasting, sustainable because it is integrated, and sustainable because it is achieving balance".*

The value of developing a holistic vision for the future, and actively using that vision to guide decision making, is recognised in four of the methodologies that inspired DesignWays: The Natural Step, Permaculture, Human Scale Development and Holistic Management.

In **TNS** an understanding of the key principles of sustainability is used to develop a future vision for development for the particular organisation, project or area, asking the question, 'What would this look like in a sustainable world?'. The system conditions are then used as a compass, so that investment decisions are tested against the long-term vision of sustainability, helping to avoid 'blind alleys' and to make sure that investments 'build a platform' for future steps towards a

sustainable future (e.g. Holmberg 1998; Robert 1997). The metaphor of a compass is useful in considering investment decisions and short-term targets. Without a clear and sustainable vision, which is used to guide action, we may be moving very quickly towards achieving targets, but if we don't have a clear sense of what direction that is taking us in, we may well be spending money and effort heading in the wrong direction.

In **Permaculture** a holistic plan is seen as important to allow for beneficial synergies between elements (in particular through consideration of the relative location of elements to allow for cycling of energy and material flows). A permaculture plan identifies areas of importance in the landscape, with a particular focus on biodiversity and water (flow, filtering and potential for storage) to ensure that they are protected and enhanced. If a long-term vision of an area is developed, then each small step can be carried out in such a way as to contribute to the realisation of the whole vision (e.g. tree planting to contribute towards windbreaks, or developing areas of habitat in such a way as to connect existing habitats in a network within the larger landscape). At the same time, using such a plan to determine siting of new elements helps to avoid irreversible change or damage to important assets or future possibilities (e.g. placing a building in an ideal site for water harvesting, or planning a road across an area that could be important for connecting up fragmented habitats) (e.g. Holmgren 2003; Mollison 1990).

In **Human Scale Development** it is seen as important to understand the basic human needs that different social and economic systems attempt to satisfy, with the aim of removing negative or inhibiting satisfiers of those needs, and attempting to develop instead synergistic satisfiers that meet more than one need at once. This encourages an awareness of the consequences of different social and economic decisions from a perspective of meeting fundamental needs. Thus different economic options are considered not as good in and of themselves, but in terms of how they contribute to a community's sense of identity, creativity, participation, security, and subsistence, etc. (Max-Neef 1991a, b).

Holistic Management was developed from the insight that many decisions are made without consideration of their long-term ability to meet the goals and deeply felt aspirations of the people who will be affected by them. A long-term, holistic

goal that is agreed by stakeholders is used to foster productive dialogue about the *means* of achieving the goals (which can vary greatly) (e.g. Savory 1991). Management should attempt to deal with wholes, requiring a *"minimum whole that includes the land, people and money involved"* (Savory 1991, pg. 187). As the context changes and the results of implementation are not always predictable, it is important to regularly check; 'Has the vision of what it is we are trying to achieve changed since we have started to make changes, and are we still headed in the right direction?', thus enabling adjustment in the light of learning.

The need for behavioural change is given as an impetus for increased participation in planning. The holistic nature of the DesignWays process was seen as important for encouraging such change, as one participant said:

> *"If you have the whole picture you think 'oh well I've knocked off that little right hand corner or that little bit now'. Whereas if you think that is the only thing that has happened, and there is no coherent plan anywhere, then why bother… It's really made me feel better about making little contributions" (Environmental Education Warden at Mersey Valley 2003).*

In order to encourage integration, planning processes should cultivate attention to searching for added synergies and benefits. It is important that methods of measuring success should recognise this, and allow for a description of added value to be taken into account in assessment. This shift complements the current debate about outcome, as opposed to output, driven planning, such as in Public Service Agreements, *"an attempt to strengthen mechanisms for setting shared priorities and measuring progress across organisational boundaries"* (James 2004, section Impact on organisational performance, para. 2). The process of benefits management[75] can assist in measuring this added value.

A holistic planning process, such as that described in this section, requires ongoing development of criteria of success that are related to the vision. Several interviewees discussed an ability to adjust the targets to which agencies and organisation are working in response to integrated planning and participation as

[75] Associated with business improvements, benefits management is the "identification of potential benefits, their planning, modelling and tracking, the assignment of responsibilities and authorities and their actual realisation as a result of investing" (Office of Government Commerce 2004, section What is benefits management?, para. 1).

an important change if the project planning process was to support active engagement of different stakeholders and community members in planning. The *Chair of North West Biodiversity Forum with English Nature (2004)* made this point:

> *"If we're going to take this seriously, we've got to start looking at funding cycles that say, you get the money [based on an initial delivery plan], then there's this period of participation after which you can revisit the targets".*

Developing consensus on important measures of success, and what targets need to be adjusted, would thus become an important aspect of the planning process.

The process of developing a long-term vision for an area may elicit a range of options that might not be operational within current delivery structures. Developing a visionary plan, even without dedicated funding to deliver the plan, means that when money became available for projects, there is already an idea of what people would like to see developed. Having such an idea in advance can lead to more integrated implementation and better use of funding. The value of developing a plan before project funding is available was recognised by the *Chair of MVRA*, *"if you have got a plan and you had finance then you can combine the pair and you have a way forward. If you have the finance and no plans, then you are thinking what shall we spend it on?".*

This type of holistic planning implies raising participants' aspirations, and developing a vision of what a community would like to see in an area, within a dialogue of how it relates to sustainability principles, and possible means of achieving the vision. The limiting factor that decision makers and funders are often concerned that participation will raise unrealistic expectations, discussed above, may be exacerbated by such a process. It is thus particularly important to couple such a process with encouragement of social learning between different agencies and community members, so that participants are aware of the difficulties of achieving some of the options. This social learning implies both an ability to think of how a particular project or programme fits into a larger picture of a sustainable future, in particular a sustainable region, and a process of learning about the conditions under which different organisations work, so that stakeholders and community members gain a better understanding of each others' work and contexts.

A process that combines capacity building and community development can empower participants and stakeholders to 'take ownership' of particular aspects of the plan and beginning to work on alternative ways to achieve it. This requires a degree of downwards devolution of responsibility and an ability of operational staff to decide what matters in terms of implementing policy objectives. Such devolution requires a degree of trust, which may be built in part through more two-way communication between policy makers and operational staff.

In order to encourage different organisations to work together to achieve their targets in a synergistic way, it is necessary to enable organisations involved in regeneration and environmental improvements to respond to opportunities for integrated planning. For example, aspects of 'planning for sustainability' can be built into staff expectations, such that staff assessment includes a description of attempts made to develop synergies between projects to deliver added benefits. An 'opportunity time budget[76]' can allow staff members to devote to developing partnerships, working to develop synergies between projects, and to participatory planning processes.

9.2.3.1 Pooling time, expertise and resources for participation

A major limiting factor for delivering meaningful participation and integrated planning is a lack of time and resources. One way to minimise this limitation would be through pooling the resources available from different sources and policy drivers to develop programmes for active involvement in a particular geographical area. Creating public/public partnerships is increasingly gaining recognition as a potential means of *"generating synergies and economies of scale"* (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004b, pg. 45).

A major limit to integrated planning is a lack of skilled and knowledgeable input into the process from experts and delivery organisations. Part of the pooling of resources would include time and expertise, so that agencies such as the Environment Agency and English Nature would provide knowledgeable input into

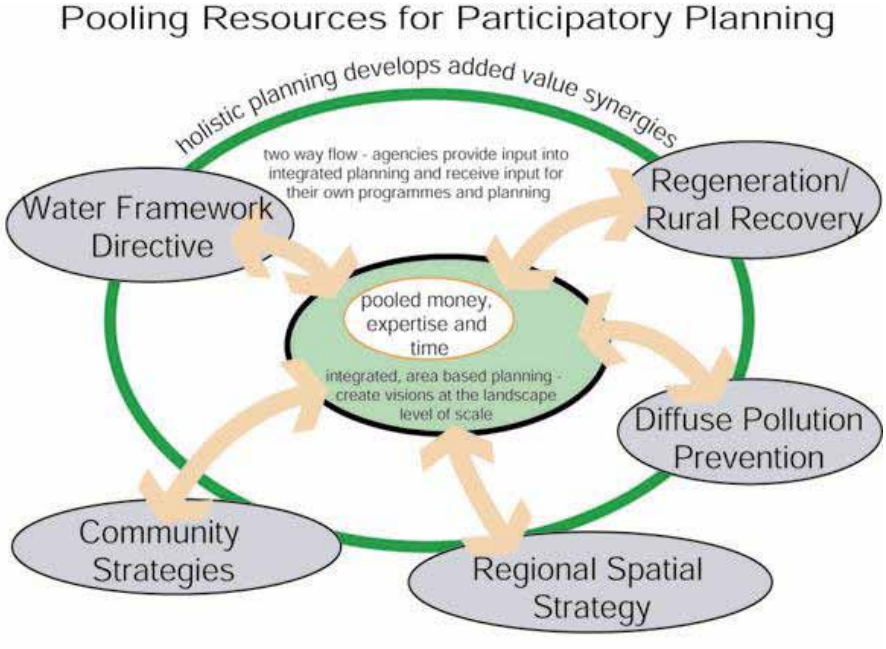
[76] An 'opportunity time budget' is time set aside specifically for working in partnership, for developing innovative projects and for working on 'value added' processes to develop synergies between projects. The author adapted this idea from a policy of the company Minnesota Mining and Metals (better known as 3M). Staff members are allowed to spend fifteen percent of their time exploring interesting ideas outside their assigned area of work (in the example of planning, this would be outside of target-driven work). The Post-it® note arose from one such exploration (Sloane 2003).

the planning process. This was seen as potentially valuable from the perspective of regeneration professionals, for instance:

> *"So, if the Environment Agency says, can we put somebody into your team [of the next regeneration initiative], to make sure that the requirements of the WFD feed into your plan, in terms of community engagement and also in terms of stakeholder planning, equally so that your plan feeds into our plans for water and the environment more widely. The other option is to set up a unit to go around the region doing their consultation exercise on water, which could have a value, but it would produce a very different result, it wouldn't be the same sort of holistic connected result that you were attempting to achieve, and indeed began to secure out of the process you went through" (Chief Executive of Renew 2004).*

As recognised in this quote, these agencies would be able to take input from the process to inform their own planning processes, implying a two-way flow of information (Figure 9-3).

Figure 9-3 Developing integrated, area based plans with resources pooled for participation



In order to facilitate the involvement of different agencies, this would require an ability to measure such a process as engaging participation in their programmes, such that they are able to 'tick the participation box' and show that they have

actively engaged with community members and stakeholders. By doing this with a holistic process, they would more likely be able to engage with a wide range of different agencies and stakeholders. This would require an active process of looking for connections, as elucidated by the *Chief Executive of Renew (2004),* who discussed the recommendations arising from this research:

> *"If you drew this [diagram to show pooling of resources from the WFD and regeneration] differently and that was Housing Market Renewal and that was Crime and Disorder [as drivers of participation], the question is, how much commonality is there, and can the team make the connections in a meaningful way so that one set of interactions will feed the others?"*

Nine of the participants interviewed in this research felt that using a system like DesignWays for coordinating different types of participation in an area could help reduce consultation fatigue. This would require coordination of different planning activities. Participants on the DesignWays process said they felt the form of the toolkit and its holistic nature could help to facilitate this coordination. Two of these were community members. The *Chair of MVRA* said she could see aspects of the toolkit being useful for the health forum in which she is involved, and felt that it could help reduce frustration on behalf of community members, as it was a *'more interesting'* way of doing consultation than usual. An *Irk Resident (2003a)* said:

> *"We should be doing this with everything - health, education - everybody indulging in ideas about how they want the future to be".*

Demonstrating such an approach would help to dispel cynicism amongst community members. Having different public sector workers around the table discussing options with them would go a long way to helping them feel that their ideas were being listened to. Discussing the value of having different project officers communicating together and developing a holistic plan, one Moston Vale resident said:

> *"I have to say I think it is the only way ahead because I think it has to be that each individual body knows exactly what they and the others are going to do, and then you don't have somebody coming in and saying 'oh let's do that' and then another body coming in and saying 'oh that shouldn't have been done'. There is more money wasted and resources lost because of that" (Chair MVRA 2003).*

A further advantage in terms of developing trust with community members is that if such a process was seen as an ongoing cycle, with a range of public sector bodies attending planning workshops, a sense of continuity would be developed. Developing a network of relationships would help to reduce the reliance on a few key individuals to provide continuity. Different people could attend workshops, but there would be more likely to be some overlap between people on different occasions. A network approach such as this to building relationships, with several public bodies involved, would provide a more robust process for the community members, as well as promoting learning between the agencies about their work programmes, targets and potential areas of synergy.

Different planning cycles could have slightly different emphases, depending on the context and the particular programmes and timelines of the agencies. At different times they could, for instance, focus more on water issues, in order to provide input to the Environment Agency for developing the Programme of Measures for the WFD, or at other times, they could focus more on poor health, if this has been determined as a major economic limiting factor in an area. The workshops should still be holistic, and allow for discussion of the wide range of issues in an area.

The *Social Policy Advisor (National) Environment Agency (2004)* discussed the exploration the Environment Agency is making of the possibilities for convergence (streamlining the Environment Agency planning processes, such as Catchment Abstraction Management Plans, and Fisheries Action Plans) and integration (the interaction of the Agency with the planning processes of external bodies). She discussed the potential benefits for the Environment Agency of utilising existing participation processes to gain extra input into the River Basin Planning Process of the WFD, as well as potential value of being able to provide an environmental and sustainability input into development plans and regeneration strategies.

The *Senior Countryside Officer at Countryside Agency (2004)* saw the potential value for the Countryside Agency of being part of such holistic discussions, citing recent examples of a lack of awareness amongst Primary Health Care Trusts of the potential health benefits of developing access and recreational opportunities

on their fairly large land holdings, which could equally help the Countryside Agency to meet their targets of improved access to the countryside.

It is well recognised that delivering an integrated, meaningful approach to participation is resource intensive. Pooling resources, and working to provide a process tailored to provide useful input to a range of players, could help to streamline the overall process. Developing a more holistic approach can help agencies such as English Nature to prioritise their inputs into participatory planning. As the *Conservation Officer - Mersey with English Nature (2004)* commented:

> *"I don't think we would ever have the capacity to give each Local Authority the same level of high service, therefore we have to prioritise our effort and resources. But having something that basically can facilitate that for us, that we could give some money to, then we can go to the 'design team' and say 'we have a protected site up here and it is failing our nature conservation targets and we have to do something, let's see what we can do with it'."*

The potential for such a 'design team' to facilitate links with local businesses, such as Jaguar that uses a local nature reserve for visitors to their plant, to achieve mutually beneficial results, was recognised both by this interviewee and the *Chair of North West Biodiversity Forum with English Nature (2004),* who commented:

> *"There is quite a radical way of looking at this, is that if this starts making commercial sense and it's a big 'if', then you can see as a service that is funded partly from the public and partly from the private sector. From our point of view, business, private enterprise, wants to deliver biodiversity improvements and they are actually prepared to pay to do it."*

9.2.3.2 Turning vision into delivery on the ground

A key finding from the author's earlier research into the success of the Mersey Basin Campaign was; in order to synthesise bottom-up and top-down planning, it is important to start small, with projects that lead to success stories, and to develop communication strategies to relate these projects to the picture of long-term improvement in a larger area.

Turning a vision, such as that created for the Irk Valley Project, into delivery on the ground requires an approach not dissimilar from the planning process that

produced the plan. It requires partnership development, through identifying ways of aligning the interests of several players (in particular potential funders or funding programmes and delivery organisations), so that several different streams of money can be used to fund the delivery.

For instance, a proposal for an interpretative nature trail along the river Irk emerged from the planning workshops. No single organisation can deliver such a proposal, as there are many different landowners. Several different organisations, however, could have an interest in contributing to part of the trail, be it through arts and artistic programmes (which might attract some events and arts based funding from North City Arts) through historical and archaeological interest groups (which might attract some in-kind support from local historians and University Departments) and through organisations concerned with health and public access (who may be able to attract funding for pathways and access points to encourage more people to exercise in the area). This requires a process of building alliances between different organisations, identifying potential synergies and benefits to them, and communicating about those potential benefits, both to get things started and to maintain interest over a longer period of implementation and maintenance.

One advantage of a holistic vision is that there are many possible avenues for funding and support available, each with a different angle. For instance, it may be possible to use some Neighbourhood Renewal Funding to deliver aspects of physical improvements, in addition to National Health Service funding for community health projects.

Involving local businesses can help in implementation on many levels. They may be landowners, and be willing to provide access to their land, as in the case of HMG Paints, who have developed the New Millennium Woods along the formerly barren banks of the River Irk (Figure 9-4), which could provide a valuable feature in the proposed riverside walkway. Businesses may be willing to provide assistance in implementation, both through financial and in-kind support.

Figure 9-4 New Millennium Woods and Riverside Restoration at HMG Paints

The planning process should include consideration of programmes and activities in the area that could assist in implementation, and should encourage discussion between participants about possibilities for partnership working and different ways of delivering aspects of the vision. The process can itself help participants to identify potential synergies between organisations and programmes. The value of this was recognised by the *Forestry Commission Newlands Regional Project Officer (2004)*, reflecting on the process at Moston Vale:

> *"There was a very good exercise done with social capital, finding out what people already had and what they knew they had, this has helped Groundwork to get further ahead with the project in that area, than they are in another area. It's the same Groundwork, doing a consultation for Newlands, and they are much further on than another Groundwork further away, which hasn't had the benefit of any of this".*

A key role in this process is that of a partnership developer. This is the role that RVI Coordinators play in the MBC. It involves a person (or team) who can look for opportunities, and ongoing activities and programmes, to make connections between them and use them to further the delivery of an overall strategic vision. This role should also include identifying potential funding streams.

Having such a role, with a *"with a broad remit to build partnership, and to establish a point of contact for people working on the ground" (Environmental Strategy Team Leader at Manchester City Council 2004)* allows for long-term development of relationships with different delivery bodies, local businesses and with local people. This helps

to build capacity amongst community members, enabling them to contribute to a bottom-up process of delivery, for example through tree planting days, development of interpretation materials with local artists and schools, and management of open spaces through 'Friends of' groups. Small grants can help to support such groups, often enabling them to achieve a lot of work with little money. This was a key aspect of the development of the Mersey Basin Voluntary Network (later Mersey Basin Trust) *(Director of Corporate Services with Ground Work Foundation 2001).*

A community trust fund could help to support ongoing maintenance and activities, helping to support both capacity building and physical improvements in the environment. This was demonstrated in the Renewal Trust in the St. Ann's regeneration area in Nottingham, which also provides funds to training and to support community businesses and co-operatives in the regeneration area (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2000).

A community trust could be particularly valuable in some of the areas that fall outside of the remit of the more typical projects and publicly managed green spaces, which may be helpful in developing a connected series of ecologically valuable, attractive places for local use. It is important to build local representation into the management bodies for regenerated sites, helping to develop locally acceptable ways to maintain and manage the site, as well as maintaining links with community organisations that can help to manage a site over time. Local businesses may be able to provide skills and mentoring to community members in managing such a trust (Forestry Commission Newlands Regional Project Officer 2004). Funds should be released from community trusts for projects when it can be demonstrated that a dialogue about options has been encouraged amongst community members and stakeholders, and decisions have been tested against the community's vision for the area.

The use of delegated funding for project delivery is another possible funding mechanism to help support more integrated delivery of a vision. As practiced by the Countryside Agency for some small projects, delegated funding:

> *"gives a local group/project a good deal of control over how they progress their objectives, whilst ensuring that what they do is contained within an essential management framework to ensure both probity, accountability, transparency and strategic fit. The process could thus be said to be objectives, rather than financially, driven" (Senior Countryside Officer at Countryside Agency 2004).*

This can also help to reduce hurried spending towards the end of the financial year, as *"under-spend is simply recycled and retained for future use when that use becomes possible in participation terms".*

It is important to ensure income streams to support ongoing participation in both planning and maintenance. This was demonstrated by the success of Bold Moss, a large area of land in St. Helens that is managed by the Groundwork Trust. British Coal endowed Groundwork with a sum of money to complete the reclamation and sustain the landscape. The public benefit that the reclamation could provide was used to attract significant grant aid to supplement this endowment (Handley et al. 1998, and pers. comm.). In the Newlands Project a sum of money to maintain the land for fifteen years has been made available for each site, including Moston Vale, which could be used to support local organisations in helping to manage the site.

At the same time, having a vision for the area can help a partnership or leader in the area to influence design decisions. For instance, the vision developed for the Irk Valley Project included a sustainable visitors' centre at Harpurhey Reservoirs. Having such a vision elucidated can be used to influence decisions about financial spending. Thus, when money does become available to regenerate the site, the IVP Project Officer can demonstrate the potential for a more creative solution than might be the case without this vision. This will require leadership and attention to the decision making process, but will be made easier with a clear vision that demonstrates a degree of local input. Having a compelling and attractive vision can help this process. Communication materials that include comments from participants, as well as appealing graphics and sketches of possibilities, helps to create a sense of excitement and an understanding of what is possible. This can be helpful in attempting to develop relatively new types of projects, such as an ecologically designed building, which may well be unfamiliar to many funders.

The delivery of integrated plans should be seen as part of community and partnership development, building on existing activities and strengths, looking for synergies and beneficial relationships in terms of projects, timing and processes of development, and encouraging active involvement of business and community members.

9.2.4 Recommendations

This section makes specific recommendations arising from the findings of this research. General recommendations for improving the practice of participatory planning are followed by an exploration of a possible mechanism for delivering these recommendations. This is followed by key characteristics of an academy to promote professional practice in this emerging field.

9.2.4.1.1 General recommendations for participatory planning

Levels of Scale

- Provide increased opportunities for active stakeholder involvement in planning at the landscape level of scale (Figure 9-6 below). This can inform local level planning.
- Catalyse stakeholder interest in planning at the landscape level by linking it with planning at the site level (Figure 9-7 below). Thus small-scale projects can be implemented as part of a broader envisioning process.
- Use strategic issues developed at the river basin or regional level of scale to inform planning at the landscape level of scale. Solutions to these issues may also be developed in planning at the landscape level.
- Develop mechanisms for synthesis of top-down and bottom-up planning, e.g. through using communication tools that can be transferred across different levels of scale and working at more than one level of scale in a parallel planning process (see Figure 9-9 below).

Working with Stakeholders

- Use stakeholder mapping exercises to develop a dynamic information resource about stakeholders in the area. This should include information about their interests, capacities and activities. Ensure that user groups and potential delivery organisations are included.
- Use existing programmes and organisations to broaden the range of input from stakeholders and community members.
- Develop planning programmes that fit with stakeholders' contexts and add value to their activities, e.g. which focus on projects of mutual interest and provide skills training and qualifications.
- Involve partners and possible delivery organisations in the planning process, so that they can provide input into the plans. Partners can provide in-kind support to the process, such as mapping, data analysis and design.
- The planning process itself should include consideration of programmes and activities of implementation, and should encourage discussion between participants about possibilities for partnership and ways of delivering the plans.
- Explore the possibility of pooling resources (e.g. time, money and expertise) for different participatory processes (e.g. those required by the WFD, Community Strategies and regeneration projects) to allow for more resources to enhance the quality of an integrated process (Figure 9-3, pg. 413).

Planning Process

- Provide opportunities to imagine the future differently through active involvement of community members and stakeholders early in the design of options and plans.
- Planning processes need to be ongoing, to allow for new input, and reassessment from learning, as projects are implemented.
- Use a hands-on planning process that builds capacity amongst participants.

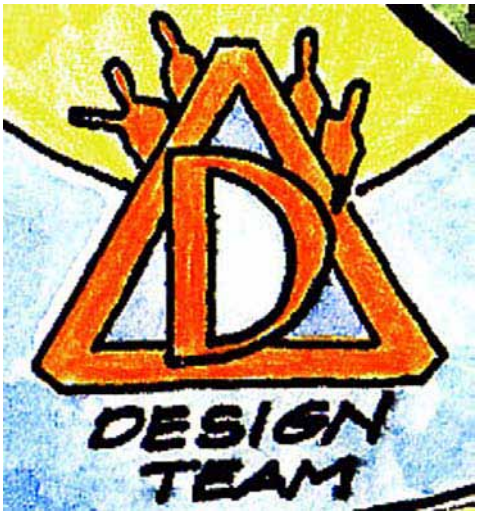
- Use sustainability principles to stimulate dialogue whilst designing options, as well as an appraisal tool.
- Integrate participatory planning and ecological design to enhance 'planning for sustainability'.
- Develop planning processes to focus on opportunities and assets (e.g. cultural, biological, landscape, historical), not problems.
- Don't rely on creativity happening on its own, utilise creative thinking tools and skills training.
- Use a holistic approach to maximise potential synergies from participation.

9.2.4.1.2 Adding value through participatory ecological design

This section describes a possible mechanism for enabling integrated planning across different levels of scale. The delivery mechanism in different areas would depend on context and would need to be designed to take regional partnerships and stakeholders' programmes into account. The potential role of the emerging Regional Centres of Excellence for regeneration (e.g. Renew in the NorthWest) in such a process should be explored. The general principles described below are transferable to different contexts.

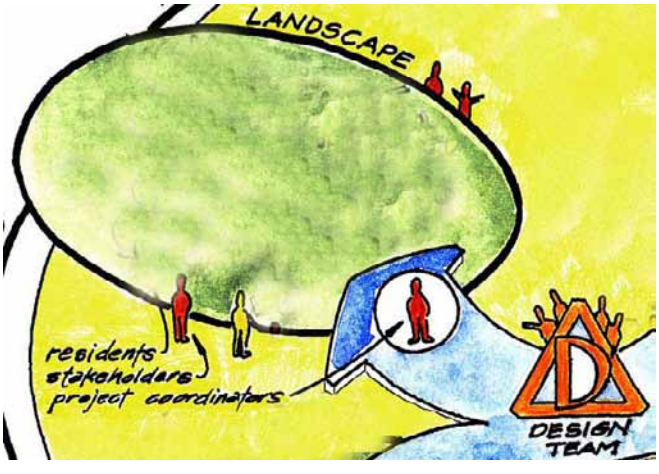
- Develop a regional (or Basin level) participatory planning resource team ('Design Team', Figure 9-1) to provide support to partnerships and organisations in developing plans at the landscape level of scale. This 'Design Team' should include the following capacities: facilitation of integrated participatory planning; ecological design; GIS and mapping; landscape ecology; and landscape, urban and graphic design.

Figure 9-5 Proposed 'Design Team'



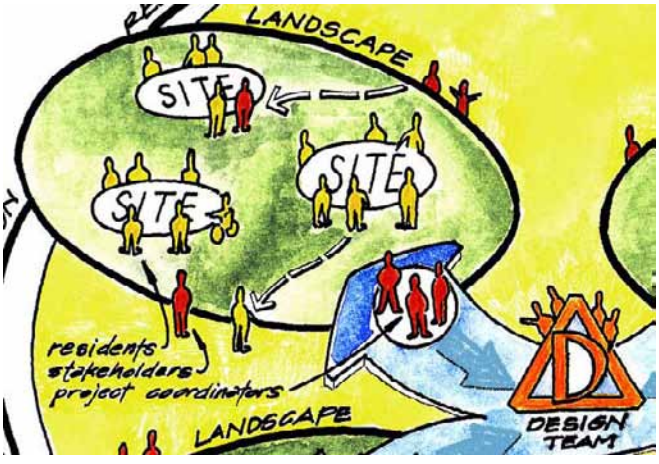
- Such a 'Design Team' could provide additional resources, including facilitation of envisioning processes, to local project coordinators (e.g. RVI Coordinators, LSPs), to develop strategic, integrated plans at the landscape level of scale with stakeholders and community members (Figure 9-6).

Figure 9-6 Create opportunities to plan at the landscape level of scale



- The Design Team can work with project coordinators and partnerships to facilitate participatory planning for projects at the site level of scale, which can be used to inform planning at the landscape level of scale (Figure 9-7). This should include working with local businesses, industrial clusters and farmers, as appropriate.

Figure 9-7 Catalyse community participation at landscape level through site level planning



- Develop a communication strategy with partners to build interest in planning at the landscape level of scale through success stories at the site level.

- Use a transferable design process at the two levels of scale, and encourage community members' input to the landscape level of scale planning.

- Include skills training for project coordinators, stakeholders and community members as part of the envisioning process.

- As the need for this support varies over time in the different areas, a flexible team of resource people can offer support to several different landscape areas (Figure 9-8).

Figure 9-8 'Design Team' offers support to different areas dependent on need and opportunity

- Enable organisations involved in regeneration and environmental improvements to be able to respond to opportunities for integrated planning and partnership working. For example, aspects of 'planning for

sustainability' can be built into staff expectations. An 'opportunity time budget' can allow staff members to devote time to developing partnerships and explore potential synergies between projects.

- Organisations such as United Utilities and the Environment Agency can meet their involvement targets by being involved in this holistic planning process, such that they bring expertise and time as in-kind support to the planning, and are able to take away input for their own projects and programmes. This helps to overcome a key difficulty, gaining expert input to the dialogue.

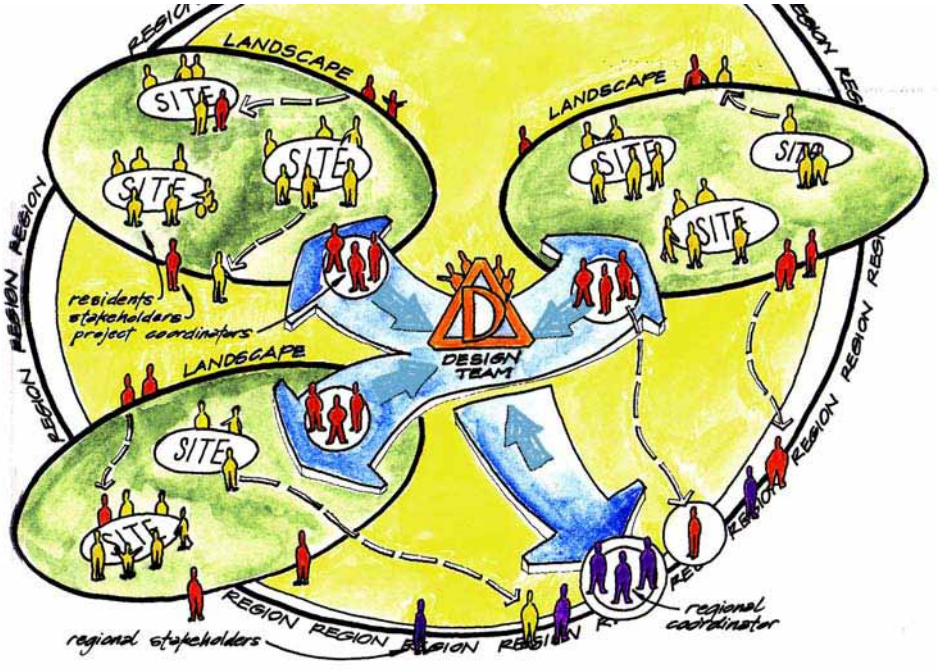
- The 'Design Team' can thus be seen as a service provider for several different agencies. Agencies can use the services of the Design Team to help deliver their participation requirements, and to ensure that those requirements add value to the larger understanding of the key issues in an area for other projects. Staff members from different organisations working to deliver sustainable communities could be seconded to the Design Team, providing important skills and gaining experience in cross-sectoral working.

- The 'Design Team' could act as facilitators of workshops at the regional (or River Basin) level of scale (Figure 9-9). In these, stakeholders and community members involved in site and landscape level planning would work with regional stakeholders to identify key issues for strategic planning at the regional scale emerging from local level planning.

- The 'Design Team' could also facilitate issue related workshops that cross geographical and scale boundaries, helping to identify networks of people to discuss them.

- This planning process should create opportunities to use landscape level planning to provide information and inspiration to statutory planning processes, including: Local Development Frameworks, Regional Spatial Strategies and the River Basin Planning process of the WFD (with a particular focus on sub-basin plans and the Programme of Measures).

Figure 9-9 Mechanism for added-value planning to link site, landscape & regional levels of scale



- Develop more flexible funding arrangements, e.g. through delegated funding and community trusts for implementing plans, letting the planning process determine the funding cycle, rather than the funding cycle driving overhasty implementation.

- Allocate funds for ongoing maintenance. This should include resources for further review and planning with stakeholders.

9.2.4.1.3 Development of a professional academy for training in 'planning for sustainability' processes

- Develop a professional academy to co-ordinate training, regulate accreditation and disseminate information about best practice and up-to-date toolkit materials. Setting up a National Centre for Sustainable Communities Skills was recommended in the *Egan Review – Skills for Sustainable Communities* (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004a). This might provide a suitable institutional 'home' for such an academy.

- Develop three tiers of accreditation: NVQ or OCN accreditation for community members and stakeholders, CPD accreditation for professional stakeholders who attend workshops (these provide incentives for participation), and a Diploma for facilitators of the process (which should be tiered to allow for 'train-the-trainers' programmes). Accreditation process should allow for validation of existing skills and knowledge. Explore relationship with programmes and institutions emerging from the *Egan Review* and with existing accreditation bodies, e.g. the Professional Practice for Sustainable Development of the Institute of Environmental Sciences.

- Delivery of training can be carried out by accredited trainers, utilising existing institutions and structures (such as the InterAct partnership, the Environment Council and the Centres for Regeneration Excellence), and through regional 'Design Teams' as described above. The training itself should be project-based, so that participants learn through being involved in participatory planning processes.

9.2.5 Answering the Research Question

Research Question 4. What are the operational, institutional and policy implications of a holistic approach to active involvement in planning?

There are five key attributes of participatory planning processes that can help to realise the challenges of the WFD elucidated in Chapter 4. These can be summarised as:

1. educational framework of sustainability;
2. ecological design process;
3. creative involvement of stakeholders in planning;
4. scaleable design language to link different geographic levels of scale;.
5. and underlying framework of systems thinking.

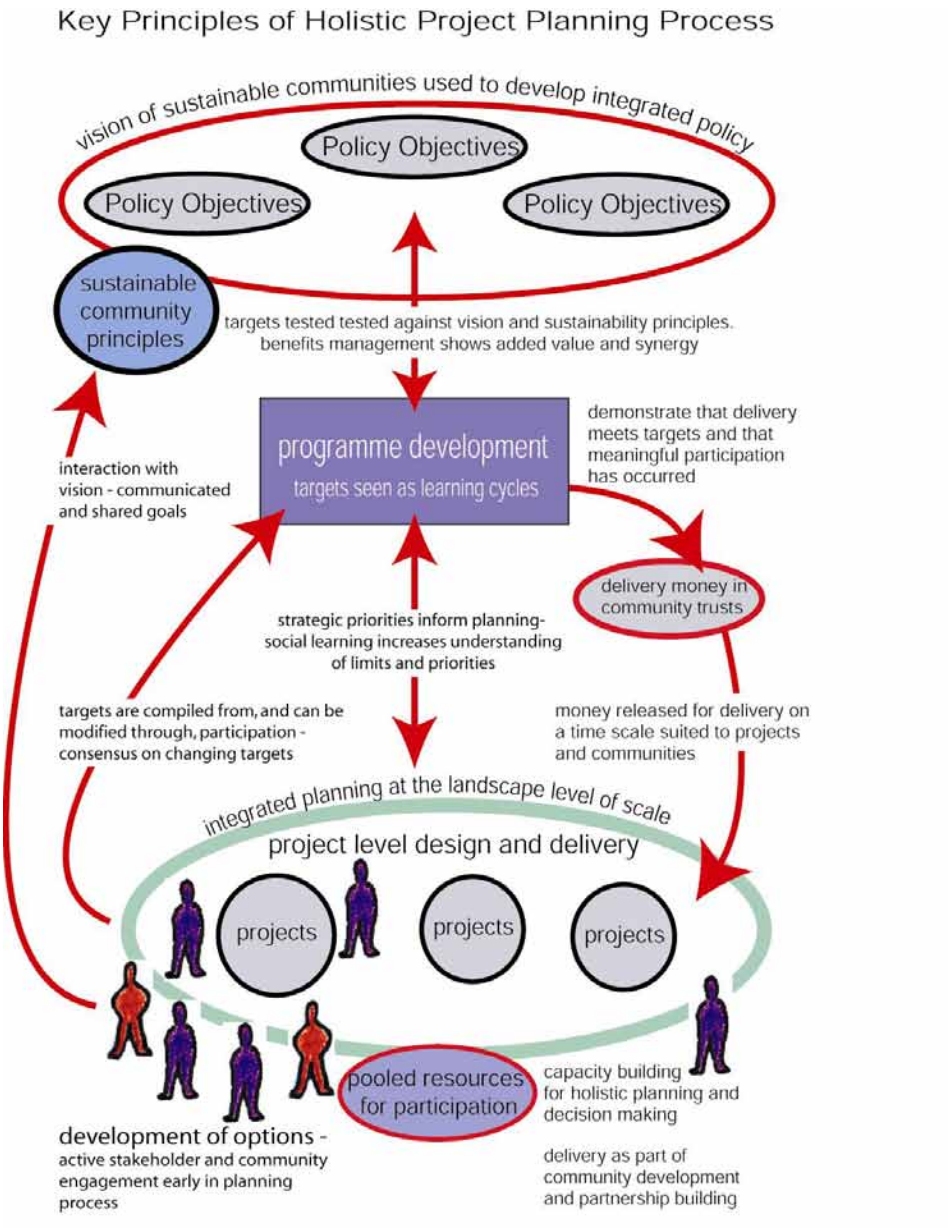
Figure 9-10 summarises key shifts that would support a holistic planning process such as that described above in the Section 9.2.4 'Recommendations'. It can be seen as a response to the issues summarised in Figure 9-2 on pg. 405.

The limiting factors discussed in Section 9.2.2, 'Analysis of limiting factors' can act as significant barriers to holistic planning. The pooling of resources and development of integrated, area based plans could help to streamline the process of participation. It still requires considerable time and resources, but can produce more meaningful results for a wide range of stakeholders if carried out in a more holistic fashion.

A major barrier is the pressure of working to short-term targets and rigid timelines. In the model above, targets are seen more as learning cycles, and they can be adjusted in response both to participation and learning, as actions are taken and the context changes. This adjusting of targets should be carried out with reference to high level goals and principles of sustainability. The process of releasing funding for project delivery in this model is linked to demonstrating that meaningful participation has occurred, and that the action or development proposed helps to meet the long-term vision of the area. Alternative financial

instruments that allow for a more flexible timeline in terms of project expenditure, and allow for revenue funding, would greatly assist in this process.

Figure 9-10 Answering Research Question 4 – Summary



A shift to a more holistic approach to planning would require a change of culture and capacity amongst a wide range of organisations and stakeholders. In particular it would require a willingness to invest time and resources in the short term to achieve long-term sustainable gains. It would require an acceptance of uncertainty

and a greater degree of trust to allow staff at operational level to try unfamiliar techniques and processes.

Recent shifts in policy requiring demonstration of increased participation and active involvement in planning, provide an impetus to rethink the relationship between participatory and representative democracies. This can provide an opportunity to develop more fruitful ways of delivering policy objectives. Whilst many of the concerns discussed above are rooted in institutional and organisational structures, they also require changes in terms of individuals' perceptions and capacities. This research has shown that shifts in terms of individual skills and capacity can occur through being actively involved in a holistic planning process.

The possible changes in the decision making process which are elucidated in Figure 9-10 represent an idealised vision for the future. The principles described in Section 9.2.3 'Holistic planning process' can, however, also be applied in a pragmatic way in the current situation, to begin to move towards a more holistic process. The experience of working with the Irk Valley Project in this action research has demonstrated that it is possible to engage a wide range of stakeholders in active involvement in 'planning for sustainability'.

Setting up the action research required an approach of identifying possible opportunities to make connections between different organisational goals, then using these connections to work out possible benefits for different potential partners. Ways of acquiring in-kind and financial support for the project were identified, based on these potential benefits. Having started with fifty pounds to photocopy invites, the author was able to raise over £5000 cash, plus considerable in-kind donations on this basis. The identification of synergies was an ongoing process, and required communication to highlight the potential benefits for different parties. It was also important to identify a partner to work with who was interested in trying something new, and who had sufficient leadership and autonomy to support a sometimes difficult process, as the Irk Valley Project Officer did in this case.

The possibility of a developing a project at the site level of scale (Moston Vale) was used as a 'carrot' to engage participation planning at a more strategic level.

By working with the IVP and its partners to identify a project that was useful for their agendas and work outputs, it was possible for the project officers from several different organisations (e.g. Red Rose Forest and Manchester Housing Neighbourhood Renewal) to justify their involvement in the more abstract planning process for the whole Irk Valley Project area. This pragmatic approach reflects Innes' (1996, pg. 469) insight that a comprehensive planning process *"should be issue orientated and rooted in current tasks and problems, even when its goal is to develop general policies".*

The process described above was similar, on a smaller scale, to the development of the Mersey Basin Campaign, which *"emerged on the basis of people seeing opportunities and needs and developing practice… in an opportunistic way, but also in a way which was consistent with its brief." (Director of Corporate Services with Ground Work Foundation 2001)*.

Discussing possible ways of furthering the DesignWays process, the *Chair of North West Biodiversity Forum with English Nature (2004)* suggested, *"approach it organically I would say… take opportunities as they come".* The process of holistic planning described above suggests that it is important to have a clear vision of a desirable future (such as that summarised in Figure 9-10 and the recommendations above), then to work out ways move in that direction, looking for ways to advance a part of the vision in response to opportunities, and testing decisions against the future vision to make sure they are working towards, and not against, it. There are many barriers to achieving a more holistic planning process, but there are also many opportunities to move in that direction.

9.3 Research Question 5 – Broader field of ecological planning and systems thinking

'It works in practice, does it work in theory?'

In the section above the fourth research question was explored, concluding with recommendations for improving planning practice. The final research question, explored in more depth in this section, is:

Research Question 5. How do these findings fit into the broader theoretical framework of ecological planning and systems thinking?

9.3.1 Ecological planning

Discussing spatial planning and current environmental problems Forman (1998, pg. 449) states, there is a clear need to *"rethink existing planning principles and approaches".* A potential value of a participatory protocol for ecologically informed design lies in its ability to help meet key challenges of the WFD and other environmentally orientated legislation. It can also help to improve the process of developing plans for social and economic regeneration.

The findings of this research suggest the need to reconsider the concept of 'sustainable development' itself. The concept has two possible interpretations. The 'weak sustainability' (and mainstream) approach asks the question 'How do we make development more sustainable?'. This approach questions neither the underlying drivers of development nor the economic model of growth.

As discussed in Chapter 4, making 'business as usual' more sustainable is not likely to be enough, if we are to meet the challenges set by ambitious legislation such as the WFD. The question perhaps should be 'How do we develop more sustainably?'[77]. This question implies the need to rethink definitions of development, and the type of change they imply. This question is particularly pertinent when considering the expenditure of a great deal of resources, as is the case with ongoing regeneration efforts in North Manchester (Figure 9-11 and Figure 9-12), and will be the case in implementing the WFD.

Figure 9-11 Houses demolished in regeneration area of North Manchester

[77] Thanks to Angus Soutar for helping to develop this argument in a lively e-debate.

Figure 9-12 New development across the street, built up to edge of tributary of the Irk

In an address to the World Bank, Daly (1993, pg. 267) stressed the importance of understanding the difference between quantitative change, necessitating growth, and qualitative change, implying development that is not predicated on growth:

> *"To grow means 'to increase naturally in size by the addition of material through assimilation or accretion'. To develop means 'to expand or realize the potentialities of; to bring gradually to a fuller, greater, or better state'. When something grows it gets bigger. When something develops it gets different. The earth's ecosystem develops (evolves), but does not grow. Its subsystem, the economy, must eventually stop growing, but can continue to develop".*

He discusses the value of the metaphor of an ecosystem for human development. An ecosystem develops in intricacy and potential for biodiversity, whilst running off the same basic throughput of sunlight and water. Rethinking the nature of human needs, as Max-Neef (1991b) has in the *'human scale'* model of endogenous development, is an important component of rethinking the nature of development.

In the DesignWays process participants are encouraged to question what constitutes quality of life, and relate this to future possibilities for development in their area. Van der Heijden (2004, pg. 147) distinguishes two types of futures

thinking: strategic planning *'the principles of predict and control,'*, which implies a *'search for the truth';* and *'learning through participation'*, seen as a *'search for what works'*.

The DesignWays process encourages participants to think about their goals and aspirations, and to develop several alternative visions of what is possible in an area to try and achieve them. Participants are encouraged to explore alternative models of development, which could work more like an ecosystem, developing and changing in quality, rather than predicated on constantly increasing throughputs of resources. This process encourages participants to realise that the current development trajectory is not inevitable; it is possible actively to promote a sustainable future.

The process of industrialisation and urbanisation has cut across the connection between people and nature, a physical complement to the *'disenchantment of the world'* discussed by Weber (2001) in his exploration of the individual, society and *'the spirit of capitalism'*. This physical dislocation is well illustrated in the Irk Valley; with its contaminated land, buried waterways and litter-filled open spaces. A sense of social deprivation is also rife.

Gruenewald (2003, pg. 7) has pointed out, *"The idea that people need to develop mutually enhancing relationships with nature before they will act on its behalf is not a new idea".* This research points to the potential for capacity building through active involvement in ecological planning. The DesignWays process aims to maximise participants' sense of what is positive in their area, using that awareness to develop a better understanding of the interactions of human culture and ecology.

The concept of 'embodied realism' implies that our mental constructs develop through bodily experiences. The structure of the environment can have a profound impact on mental development. The concept of *'pedagogy of place'* elucidated by Orr (1994) suggests that we need ecosystems, not just for health, but also for mental development. This suggests that we need to embody and reflect ecosystems in human settlements.

In DesignWays the local ecology is seen as a source of inspiration. Ecological principles are taught as a vibrant model for new possibilities. Exploring a

worldview in which humans are an integral part of nature helps re-embed people into the workings of the natural system.

The process of developing visions for particular landscapes and areas provides opportunities to promote integrated planning amongst a wide range of agencies and organisations working in an area. The process of dialogue can encourage learning about the different strands of sustainability amongst all of the participants, as well as providing an opportunity to reflect on the likely outcomes of projects and programmes. Such a long-term view can help to develop programmes that are more likely to achieve beneficial outcomes.

9.3.2 Systems thinking

> *"The all-encompassing frame of the modern worldview stops us listening to the world…. In particular it has brought the twin global crises of justice and sustainability. I want to suggest to you that these two crises represent an enormous challenge, and one that cannot be fully addressed within the modern worldview, because it is that worldview that has substantially brought about these crises" (Reason 2002, pg. 3).*

Systems thinking is essentially a process of exploring connections. The DesignWays approach uses living systems biology and systems thinking as a framework to enhance learning, based on the proposition that a creative and abundant future is possible through cultivating an ability to 'think like an ecosystem'.

If the aim is to design in a way more consistent with living systems, it is worth asking, 'What is life?', as did the Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela (1992). They found that the answer was inextricably interwoven with the question 'What is cognition?'. The process of knowing and self-reproducing in the world is inherent in the act of living (Maturana and Varela 1987). This insight led to the development of the theory of autopoiesis, which explores the relationship between the process of interacting with the environment and the development of living organisms. The idea of 'enacted cognition' in autopoiesis:

> *"was the result of suspecting that biological cognition in general was not to be understood as a representation of the world out there, but rather as an ongoing bringing-forth of a world, through the very process of living itself".*

The theory has led to an exploration of emerging properties of living systems at different levels of scale. This includes a debate about whether or not the interactions of the earth's geo-chemical cycles and living organisms in a state of dynamic homeostasis can be considered as constituting the Earth itself as a living entity (e.g. Lovelock 1991; Sagan 1990).

In his search for *'the pattern which connects'* Bateson (1972; 1979) looked at concepts of cognition and life, attempting to understand how systems self-organise and adapt in a constantly fluctuating environment. The importance of patterns in a holistic view of the world is emphasised in the following quote from *Holism and Evolution*, written in 1926 by the Prime Minister of South Africa:

> *"If you take patterns as the ultimate structure of the world, if it is arrangements and not stuff that make up the world, the new concept leads you to the concept of wholes. Wholes have no stuff, they are arrangements. Science has come round to the view that the world consists of patterns, and I construe that to be that the world consists of wholes" (Smuts 1926).*

Advances in the science of dynamic systems, including complexity and chaos theories provide an opportunity to *"learn from the principles involved as they apply to various circumstances"* (O'Riordan 2000a, pg. 16). Patterns that embody ecological processes and mediate flows of material and energy can act as models for interweaving social, economic, biological and geological processes in a way that makes ecological knowledge applicable to design.

Learning from living systems can be related to the process of rethinking the nature of development discussed above. Living systems are organisationally closed. Changes in the environment can trigger changes in the organism, but cannot determine the changes. The organism cannot be separated from the environment with which it interacts, it is in a real sense embedded in a *"circular pattern of*

interaction through which it is defined" (Morgan 1997, pg. 254). It is not possible to 'regenerate' an area through applying a formula or imposing a development plan. It is only possible to create the conditions in which regeneration might flourish.

Foucault's analysis of power led him to the conclusion that real change requires *"changing our selves, our bodies, our souls, and our ways of knowing"* (Flyvbjerg 2001, pg. 122). Harnessing the energy and resources applied to participatory planning into change that improves people's lives requires active involvement. In this way power can be seen as *"productive and positive, not only as restrictive and negative"* (Flyvbjerg 2001, pg. 131).

Varela (1995) suggests that we need to *"turn to a more planetary way of thinking".* DesignWays combines attention to the process of participatory communication and the use of eco-systemic metaphors for perceiving and interacting with the environment. This is an active process, in which participants explore their values and visions, and commonalities and differences between them.

The value of learning through *'holistic gestalts',* and the way that experts are able to access such 'whole' impressions through intuition and bodily experience, was recognised by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (2000) in their analysis of the nature of learning. In their critique of analytical philosophy and the concept of 'disembodied realism', Lakoff and Johnson suggest that the commonalties of responding to the physical environment with our bodies allows for an exploration of shared truths. They suggest that because *"our conceptual system is grounded in, neurally makes use of, and is crucially shaped by, our perceptual and motor systems"* we are able to construct metaphors from basic bodily experience of the world. These metaphors enable us to communicate about this world (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, pg. 55). They suggest that metaphorical thought allows a rich and evocative means of constructing higher-level thought and abstraction. This epistemology suggests that ways of thinking are structured by the evolutionary adaptation of organisms living in the physical environment.

In a similar vein, the author posits that it is possible to communicate about sustainability because of some very basic similarities we share as biological organisms. No matter how advanced human technologies become, we still need to eat and to drink clean water. No amount of technological wizardry seems to be able to substitute for the creation of fresh water reserves on land through the action of ecosystems, nor for the capacity of plants to turn sunlight into carbohydrates.

The metaphor of the machine has influenced planning for some time. The underlying metaphor of design in this process is of a living ecosystem. This metaphorical understanding is based in patterns and similarities in the processes of evolution and development of complex organisms. Each ecosystem develops in relationship to the context of the place, and is both affected by, and affects, its surroundings. Life is not simply an accident on inert rock. Living organisms are engaged in a dynamic interplay of matter and energy, a sun-driven dance that connects rock, water and atmosphere. There is a tendency towards a self-organising state, embodying resilience. This research represents an attempt to test the metaphor of ecosystems in participatory planning as a tool for social learning. This has demonstrated that a participatory process animated through a living systems paradigm can contribute to development of more integrated, ecologically sound plans, and to enhanced learning about ecological design.

9.3.3 Answering the Research Question

Research Question 5. How do these findings fit into the broader theoretical framework of ecological planning and systems thinking?

Table 9-1 summarises the key points from the discussion above in answer to this research question.

Table 9-1 Answering Research Question 5 - Summary

Research Question 5	
Fit with broader theoretical frameworks of ecological planning and systems thinking	
Theoretical framework	**Findings**
Ecological planning	• Implementing environmental legislation provides an opportunity to rethink 'business as usual' • Ecological planning can build on a sense of positive attributes of an area, rekindling a sense of the value of ecological systems as both habitat and models for human settlements • Through encouraging an understanding of underlying patterns and the processes that inform them, it is possible to develop design solutions that integrate ecological principles and demonstrate beneficial synergies across different levels of scale • The process of eliciting participation in planning can in and of itself help to encourage social learning and increase understanding of ecological processes and principles • There is potential to maximise the benefits of participation in planning to achieve environmental and social benefits • Ecological planning requires synthesis of information from a range of stakeholders, this can be enhanced by an integrative framework and consideration of long-term goals • Social-ecological systems are dynamic, and implementing plans requires ongoing attention, implying a need for capacity building in a wide range of stakeholders • Planning at the regional and landscape levels of scale provides significant benefits for developing ecologically sound, integrated solutions, but planning at the site level is more likely to be of interest to local participants, and change is easier to implement at this level • This 'paradox of management' implies the need for a dynamic process of integrating site and regional levels of planning, and the value of the landscape level as a mediator between the two, such integration is aided through a design language that can be applied at different levels of scale
Systems thinking	• Participatory planning provides opportunities to explore new ways of thinking about relationships between humans and the environment • Such exploration may require processes to take participants out of habitual ways of thinking, creating space for dialogue and innovation • Systems thinking provides a framework for understanding connections between disparate elements and relationships across different levels of scale, essential for successful ecological planning • Consideration of patterns and relationships provides insights into 'whole systems', encouraging a different approach to design than a mechanistic view of discrete parts • Applying systems principles to planning in particular places grounds them in context, enhancing learning and their practical application • Cognition is a key attribute of life, the organism exists in its environment and is shaped by it, mental models shape how humans interact with the environment • Metaphors of living systems can provide effective tools for participants to learn about ecology, and how its principles can be applied to their contexts and areas

9.4 Conclusion

> *"The core of all the troubles we face today is our very ignorance of knowing" (Maturana and Varela 1987, pg. 28).*

According to the influential cultural anthropologist Turner (1967, pg 48), a symbol is *"a blaze or landmark, something that connects the unknown with the known".* What a sustainable future will look like is unknown. This research points to the possibility of applying insights from living systems biology in beginning to move towards the unknown.

A toolkit is only a mediator, a *'transitional object'*, between the models in people's minds and their effect on the environment through their behaviour. For Winnicott (1965; 1971) (the originator of the concept of the *'transitional object',* and its importance in child development and learning) all cultural experience is located at the transition between the self and its interactions with the world, often mediated through symbols. In the DesignWays process the toolkit allows participants to create their own *'transitional object'*, the physical artefact of their group reflections, nuanced with their knowledge and aspirations. Insights into the nature of the social construction of meaning illuminate the need to develop processes of dialogue so that participants can learn from each other, thus developing new models of reality.

Such a dialogue can act as a spur to social learning between different players, developing new ways of working that can support shifts in organisational culture towards a more holistic way of working. In this chapter the barriers to such a way of working have been analysed. A model of an alternative decision making process, which could better meet the avowed policy goals of encouraging sustainable communities and integrated water management, was developed. The experience of setting up and running this action research was used as an example to illustrate possible steps in a transition from today's situation to a more holistic approach to 'planning for sustainability'.