sue-MoT
Fit for the journey ahead

Report from sue-MoT workshop (17 November 2003)
At the Royal Statistical Society, London

1 Introduction

As part of the EPSRC Sustainable Urban Environment programme, a consortium comprising Dundee, Glasgow Caledonian and Loughborough Universities, WS Atkins, BRE and CIRIA, is conducting a scoping study into *Metrics, Models and Toolkits for Whole Life Sustainable Urban Development*.

The primary aim of the scoping study is to identify existing capabilities and gaps where urban sustainability assessment is concerned, with a view to formulating the contextual framework for a main programme which will seek to build on past efforts for the development of inclusive, holistic, multidimensional models and toolkits for all decision makers and related stakeholders within a sustainable urban development context.

The consortium hosted a workshop on 17th November 2003 at the offices of the Royal Statistical Society, London. The primary aims of the workshop were as follows;

- To aid the proper identification of knowledge gaps.
- Develop a vision of what new approaches and data might be required.
- Establish links with interested research groups and individuals as well as with developers and users of metrics, models, and toolkits that are applicable in an urban sustainability context.
- Identify stakeholder needs.

This report describes the discussions held during the workshop, sets out a summary of the workshop's findings and draws conclusions from the event which will be used to inform a framework for future tasks.

Further information on the scoping study and main programme is available at the project web-site: www.sue-mot.org.uk

2 Morning Presentations

The event commenced with by three presentations that set the stage for the day's proceedings.

The first presentation of the day was by Tom Dacey, Chief Executive of the Southern Housing Group. Tom expressed the views that there are already enough models (over 700) around. His plea was for integration

The second presentation was by David Bent from Forum For the Future, who spoke from the perspective of one who has been involved with the development of a sustainability assessment tool, namely, SIGMA. David identified the need for accountancy practices to reflect sustainability concern.

The final presentation of the morning was given by Malcolm Horner of Dundee University. Malcolm outlined the objectives of the project, which are to:
- identify the key dimensions of the problem
- draw together and evaluate existing tools
- identify existing expertise
- establish gaps in current knowledge
- assess the reliability of existing data
- define in detail the themes and early work packages for the main programme Develop the contextual framework for the main programme

3 Discussion Sessions

In order to further discuss the presentations and other issues pertinent to the workshop aims, two break-out sessions (comprising of two groups each) were conducted. In the first set of break-out sessions, the participants were divided into Tool Developers and Tool Users.

In the second set of break-out sessions, the participants were mixed in a way that would facilitate discussions between Developers and Users.

4 Outline of key points

The following section outlines the key points from the presentations and discussion sessions. These points have been ordered in to groups; Tool Characteristics; Identified Needs and Gaps; Points to Consider. It is acknowledged that many of the points could be viewed as belonging to more then one group.

Tool Characteristics

- Acceptability is key
  - Acceptability is more important than being 'the best'
- Tools need to be embedded in reality
  - Tools must be linked to solutions and must be related to context
  - Their purpose must be embedded in how they work
  - Tools must be amenable to practical applications in the market to which they are directed
  - Processes and tools must be profit led. They must provide value to stakeholders
- They must aid decision making
  - A tool that 'compares actions' is preferable to one that gives 'definitive answers
  - Tools must enable learning
- Flexibility is critical – to incorporate the new knowledge base as it develops
  - Tools must be susceptible to change over time (dynamic)
  - Tools must be scalable
  - Tools must work on micro and macro scale
  - Updating and revising tools (to keep up with changes in regulation etc.) is difficult.
  - The team needs to enable a framework for the setting of boundaries
- Tools must be capable of being understood by many different people. They must:
  - be simple, but still capable of addressing complex issues
  - be user friendly (mote important than complexity)
- Capture the complexity that sustainability embodies
  - Tools must be sensitive to time frames and be evolutionary
  - The time frame the tools will project is an issue
  - They must enable the comparisons/evaluation of different scenarios
- Account for NYMBYism and self-interest among groups
  - People who wield the tools are protective of their own interests
  - They must allow for the engagement of stakeholders
  - Tools may provide the information but the political process makes the decisions
- Proof must be robust and systematic
  - It must give an indication of what issues are more important
  - Whilst all decisions are 'political', tools should be transparent so as to provide an 'audit trail.
  - The way data is collected and when/how it is entered into the tool is important
  - It should rectify incidences of false certainty
  - Tools must allow feedback on their performance

Identified Needs and Gaps

- Definition of 'sustainability' is problematic!
- There is a need to define 'Models', 'Tools' and 'Metrics'
- There is a need for overseas tools to be looked into. How are tools used elsewhere?
- The boundaries and scope issues need to be addressed
- We need to move from a circle of blame to a virtuous circle
- Tools should be able to measure the qualitative aspects of sustainability
- Tools should consider the special circumstances of the individual/project
- Tools should be able to assess the 'what if's'
- End Users require help in interpreting outputs and help in resolving conflicts
- We need 'common' language to engage people
- Education is important (for people to embrace the concept, they must know about it)
- Lack of awareness is an issue
- The measurement of social factors continues to be a major shortcoming
- There are various pertinent data issues (e.g. reliability, availability)
- There is an absence of links between finance and sustainability
- There is an absence of expertise/knowledge in the social and economic areas (and the linkages with the 'environmental')

Points to consider

- There is currently immense repetition and duplication among tools and their capabilities. There is therefore a need to codify what currently exist, in a way that is simple enough to implement and police.
- A large number of sustainability assessment tools currently exist. Is a new tool really needed, or:
    - Is there only a need for improved interpretation?
    - Do we just need to explore all tools and take the best ones?
    - Do we just need a new approach/methodology
    - Is there only a need to 'link' tools?
- There must be collaboration with others to avoid duplication
- Tools might lead to a false sense of security
- As thinking progresses, tools will develop
- Product or Process approach?
- There is a need for the project to decide where it may want to focus its efforts.
- Are we developing a map or a territory
- Who is the end user (this can help with filtering a large number of tools)

- Economics important (The New Economics Foundation may have done work in this area)
- Don't just focus on a sector, broaden and integrate sectors
- There will be some need to assess Trade-offs vs. Compromises
- Can the output of non-sustainability assessment be used and entered as inputs into sustainability assessment?
- Possible ways in which sue-MoT may proceed could be by:
    - Classify End Users
    - Classify types of tools
    - Sort tools out as filter
    - Produce catalogue
- It might be useful to start with a matrix that shows:
    - Key issues for assessment and for whom? And do tools meet them?
    - A matrix which when completed will show where gaps exist.

- Critique of the program deliverables:
    - Guidelines on wastes, not worth pursuing as this is being done elsewhere.
    - Common currency – worth exploring
    - Integrated model – not necessarily a new model, but bringing together?
    - Holistic (accountability/transparency)
    - Framework for development of a bank of data

5 Final Thoughts

As one observer put it, the workshop brought together the 'best minds' in the field and the members of the sue-MoT consortium believe that the aims of the workshop were met. The many brilliant ideas and pertinent issues put forward are now being considered with a view to incorporating them into the consortium's work plan. The aim is to reconvene the workshop participants at a later stage and present them with more refined and concrete ideas as to how the main programme of work will progress, with the hope to again obtain their ideas and invaluable input. It is envisaged that this second workshop will be held sometime during the first quarter of 2004.