Policy context: influencing and changing behaviours[1]

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Policy context: influencing and changing behaviours

1. Introduction

This report presents a review of the policy context for the current focus on influencing and changing people's behaviour. We outline why behaviour change is important for government and policy makers and how it has risen up the political agenda in recent years. We highlight which government departments are focusing on behaviour, and how parts of the environment and land use sectors are engaging with this topic. We identify how research focusing on behaviours can be important at key points within the policy cycle and we give an overview of the relevant policy mechanisms currently used by the Forestry Commission and the forestry sector. Accompanying review reports cover theories and models of behaviour and behaviour change and describe lessons learned from behavioural interventions. A summary review report is also available, together with a discussion paper which explores how behaviour and behaviour change relate to forestry.

Governments around the world are interested in tackling a wide range of societal issues such as crime and poverty, and making effective provision for education and health. Specific problems such as obesity, climate change, crime, and 'binge drinking' have all been areas of focus for targeted policies. These issues have major implications for social well-being across populations and for public expenditure. A key challenge for policy makers is to work out how these issues can best be addressed given the inherent complexities and sensitivities surrounding interventions that, by necessity, must engage the social, individual and cultural factors shaping people's choices and behaviours. Historically interventions have been limited to legislation, regulation and financial incentives or disincentives such as taxes – so called 'carrot and stick' approaches. Sometimes traditional approaches such as legislation and regulation are viewed as ineffective or potentially damaging to businesses when they become overly bureaucratic. Therefore, new and alternative approaches utilising behavioural interventions are increasingly being developed to provide a broader mix of policy options available to policy makers (Cabinet Office, 2011 and 2012).

However, behaviour change approaches can be controversial; there is a re-occurring debate in this area centred on the balance between the role of government and its citizens. Accusations of the 'Nanny State' have been levelled at overly intrusive examples of governmental policy by those arguing that people should be able to make their own choices about how they behave. There are important ethical issues around policies that focus on behaviour. For example, if not considered carefully, policies may

lead to intrusions into the private lives of citizens, or may influence behaviour without people's awareness or consent (House of Lords Science and Technology Committee 2012), or may be seen to be promoting a particular political ideology (Shove 2010; Webb, 2012). Others have highlighted the inherent challenges of changing people's behaviour, arguing that people can become 'locked into' particular behaviours due to a range of wider societal factors that are outside their control. For example, they may drive to work because there is no bus or cycle route (Ekins, 2004).

2. Review methods

The following databases were searched to identify relevant evidence for this document:

- Science direct

- Taylor and Francis on line

- Google Scholar

- Web of Science

Grey literature was also searched using Google and by viewing government department websites such as the Department of Health (DoH), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Department for Transport (DfT), Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and the Cabinet Office. Table 1 shows the search terms used.

Table 1. Indicative terms and key words used for database searches

Behaviour	Change Maintain Understand	Policy	Plans, actions, strategies

A summary of the results of the bibliographic searches and selection criteria for this policy document is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Bibliographic searches and selection by subject area

Bibliographic search results	Documents selected for review	Selection criteria
43	32	Specific focus on behavioural insights informing policy and policy makers. Documents commissioned by government departments on behaviour. Work that has specifically influenced policy e.g. nudge concept, mindspace etc.

3. Behaviour change in government policy

Behavioural approaches and insights (i.e. influencing, changing behaviour and maintaining behaviours) are a significant topic of focus for the current coalition government in a range of policy areas. They are seen as potential alternatives to existing regulation, or approaches to be used alongside simplified and less bureaucratic regulation. The Cabinet Office set up a Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) in July 2010 to look beyond traditional policy instruments such as legislation and regulation to think of ways of supplementing these approaches with new ideas and to develop insights from areas such as behavioural economics. BIT produced a report (Cabinet Office 2009) called MINDSPACE which is a mnemonic that sets out nine of the most robust influences on people's behaviour. BIT's focus to-date has been on public health, consumer empowerment and growth, energy efficiency and climate change (Cabinet Office, 2011). For example, the team has produced a report on 'Applying behavioural insights to health' (Cabinet Office, 2010). Another example includes the introduction of 'required choice' on the DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency) website in July 2011 so that vehicle license applicants are registered as organ donors by default unless they specifically opt out. The 'Red Tape Challenge' has been developed by the current government (Cabinet Office, 2012) to identify burdensome regulation and how it can be potentially removed or simplified. The recent Civil Service reform plan (HM Government, 2012: 17) outlines new tools based on behavioural insights, digital engagement and transparency to be incorporated into new policy developments.

The coalition government's interest in behaviours was stimulated by Thaler and Sunstein's (2008) concept of 'nudge'. This concept suggests that citizens can be persuaded to change their behaviour in often quite discreet ways and sometimes even subconsciously (hence, 'nudge'). It is an approach developed within the fields of psychology and behavioural economics where behaviour is conceptualised as taking place within a so-called 'choice architecture' that encourages people to act in ways that benefit themselves and others around them.

> Choice architecture refers to the environment in which an individual makes choices. Changing the way options are presented or altering the social and physical environment can make it more likely that a particular choice becomes the natural or default preference' (House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee, 2011: 12).

Examples of 'nudge' include interventions that lead people towards positive choices, such as automatically enrolling them on a pension scheme, or placing fruit at supermarket checkouts rather than chocolates and sweets to encourage healthy eating.

More recently, another strategy - 'think' – has been developed. 'Think' posits that, given the right context and framing, citizens can '*think themselves collectively towards a better understanding of problems and more effective collective solutions'* (John et al. 2009:2). The 'think' concept is founded on deliberative democratic ideals whereby listening and reasoned debate between citizens leads to changes in people's attitudes to a particular issue, such as sustainability. Ecoteams, organised by Global Action Plan, is an example of the 'think' approach. Ecoteams brings together families, neighbours and friends to develop positive and measurable changes to the way they live to reduce waste, energy use and carbon emissions (Global Action Plan, undated). People can create new teams or join existing ones. The teams meet over a period of time to discuss, debate and agree the actions they will take. They also measure their own progress with support and ideas from Global Action Plan.

Health is a major policy area featuring a strong focus on behaviour. The Department of Health (DoH) has developed a Behaviour Change Network which aims to put behavioural science expertise at the disposal of DoH networks focusing on diet, physical activity, alcohol and health at work. Interventions have focused on reducing obesity, smoking, and drinking along with promoting healthy eating. A Behaviour and Health Research Unit has been set up by the DoH, and is a collaboration between the University of Cambridge, RAND Europe, and the University of East Anglia (University of Cambridge, undated).

Climate change and energy are also important policy areas, with DECC (Department of Energy and Climate Change) and Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and the Scottish Government all exhibiting a particular focus on behaviour change. The Scottish Government has established a 'climate change behaviours research group' to explore a range of aspects related to sustainable living. DECC's 'heat and energy-saving strategy consultation document' included a chapter focused on helping people to change behaviour (DECC and CLG, 2009). DECC have recently produced a report on a 'multi-model' approach as an introduction to thinking about energy behaviour (Chatterton, 2011).

Transport is also a policy area with an increasing focus on behaviour. The DfT commissioned a 'think piece' to look at behaviour change in transport and health (Avineri and Goodwin, 2009). It outlines that legislation and enforcement have been used to change behaviour, with examples such as speed cameras and seat belt legislation. Compliance for wearing seat belts rose over time and is attributed to clear legislation, evidence of benefits (saving lives and reducing injuries), high quality media campaigns and vociferous support. The Dft has also produced a behavioural insights toolkit (Dft, 2011) to highlight how a behavioural approach can be used in transport to achieve policy objectives.

The current political narrative around behaviour change is very much focused on individual behaviour, personal responsibility and choice, and how these are shaped by people's attitudes and values. In this narrative people are conceptualised as consumers,

with decision makers and government as enablers using interventions or incentives to help people make what are considered the 'right' choices. Shove (2010) and Webb (2012) strongly critique this and what they argue are the restricted, individualistic models and concepts of behaviour change that are used, particularly as part of current environmental policy in the UK. Webb (2012: 4) argues that a focus on economic growth via consumption that satisfies individual wants '*poses problems for any public policy* [such as environmental protection and climate change] *which calls for a recognition of the common good'.* These commentators argue for a wider debate about social transformations, a focus on social practices and changes that move away from a spotlight on the individual to involve not only '*new technological artefacts, but also new markets, user practices, regulations, infrastructures and cultural meanings'* (Elzen et al, 2004: 4). Shove (2010: 1281) shows how understanding of a situation might change when not focused on individual behaviour. For example, the concept of 'obesogenic environments' is not about individual actions but about how '*patterns of diet and exercise are socially, institutionally and infrastructurally configured'.* This theoretical perspective includes 3 elements (known as the '3 elements' model): skills and competencies; images and meanings; and materials. Taking a practical forestry example, such as interventions to encourage people to access woodlands, the 3 elements model might include changing woodland infrastructure (materials) to enable easy access on site and opportunities to carry out different fun activities such as cycling, walking, play spaces for children. It might also involve partnerships between woodland owners and civil society organisations to develop organised and led activities that can support people who lack confidence in accessing woodlands alone (skills and competencies). It could also involve the provision of information to let people know which woodlands they can access and provide some cultural and historical information about those woods (images and meanings).

Allied to this general focus on behaviour, government is interested in what lessons can be learnt from the different approaches that have been undertaken. For example, a House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee (2012) was set up to investigate the use of behaviour change interventions to achieve policy goals in the UK. A report published by the Committee, which focused on healthy eating, obesity and car usage, highlights that effective policies often use a range and combination of interventions rather than focusing on one single method (House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee, 2012). For example, a ban on smoking in public places combined with marketing campaigns to highlight the dangers of smoking and the availability of smoking cessation services has led to a significant reduction in the number of smokers.

The Scottish Government recently commissioned an international review of behaviour change initiatives to learn insights and lessons from a range of behavioural interventions (such as the introduction of bicycles for hire in London) undertaken in a range of countries, such as the United States, Australia and Denmark as well as the UK (Scottish

Government 2011). A report published by the Australian government talks about 'wicked problems' that are highly resistant to resolution as they are difficult to define, multi-causal, not stable, socially complex and usually have no clear solution. Water scarcity, obesity and land degradation represent wicked problems for Australian governmental policy. The report outlines the importance of achieving sustained changes in behaviour to tackle these issues. It also emphasises that the types of problems governments face rarely fall within the responsibility of one organisation, highlighting the importance of collaboration and partnership working (Australian Public Service, 2007).

3.1. Behaviour change in environment and land use sector policy

In the environment and land use sectors there has long been a focus on behavioural approaches around sustainable development issues and pro-environmental behaviours. For example, the 'think global, act local' concept used in Agenda 21 came out of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. This was translated into Local Agenda 21 with the idea that local government and communities would join together, in a participatory way, to take action on environmental protection and conservation (United Nations, 2009). Defra has become increasingly involved in behavioural approaches for over 5 years and has commissioned a range of research and reports to better understand motivations and behaviours around sustainability issues. Research has included the development of a 'Framework for pro-environmental behaviours' (Defra, 2008), 'The diffusion of environmental behaviours' (Defra, 2009), 'Understanding and influencing behaviours (Collier et al. 2010), 'Habits, routines and sustainable lifestyles' (Defra, 2011; Darnton et al. 2011) and the development of a 'Framework for sustainable lifestyles' (Collier et al. 2010). This framework includes the '4 E's' model which is a tool enabling policy makers to consider a mix of interventions under four categories: enable, encourage, exemplify, engage. Theory suggests that influencing behaviour is most effective when approaches are combined from across these four broad areas. Defra has also been active in carrying out action-based research to understand barriers and attitudes to change (Collier et al. 2010). It has funded programmes that encourage pro-environmental behaviours such as the Greener Living Fund (2009-2011) and the Inspiring Sustainable Living Fund (2010/11). Defra has created segmentation models to explore differences in attitudes, values and behaviours between different groups within society. Through this work it has developed a public pro-environmental behaviours segmentation model, as well as farming industry and fishing industry segmentation models (Defra, 2008; Creative Research, 2009). These models are used to target policy interventions and communication focused on influencing or changing behaviour more effectively.

In 2010 two research groups were set up by Defra, the Scottish Government and the Economic and Social Research Council to carry out research on behaviours. They are the Sustainable Lifestyles Research Group and the Sustainable Practices Research Group. The former focuses on lifestyles, values and the environment in relation to the individual

at particular life transition points (e.g. retirement and birth of first child), while the latter explores habits, routines and practices that may enable or constrain people in taking action. The two groups will provide evidence on individual approaches to behaviour change as well as focusing on social practices, infrastructure, technologies, skills and knowledge that influence changes in behaviour, as well as the meanings and images associated with particular behaviours. The outputs from these two groups will contribute to understanding of how behaviours around sustainable consumption, pro-environmental behaviour, water usage and carbon schemes might be influenced or changed.

In terms of land use policy, government has recently set up two independent task forces to report on Farming regulation 'striking a balance: reducing burdens, increasing responsibility; earning recognition' (Independent report, 2011) and Forestry regulation 'challenging assumptions; changing perceptions' (Forestry regulation taskforce, 2011). Both of these taskforces outline the need to better understand farming, farmers, forestry and forest owners in order to influence behaviour and develop and implement approaches to achieving change without recourse to regulation. The Farming regulatory taskforce (Independent report, 2011: 33) recommends that '*government and industry use insights from behavioural science to enable, encourage or persuade farmers and food processors to contribute to achieving better outcomes. This is true for both developing non-regulatory solutions and improving compliance'*. The Farming and Forestry taskforce reports both discuss 'earned recognition' - a behavioural approach that gives official recognition to the efforts made by businesses and individuals in complying with specific requirements or standards, resulting in reductions in the need for formal inspections.

In forestry, the promotion and support of sustainable forest management focused on delivering widespread environmental benefits has been at the core of Forestry Commission work for decades, supported primarily by grants, regulation and partnership working. For example the FC has worked on a number of landscape partnership schemes with a wide range of organisations (e.g. Neroche, (Carter et al. 2011) Grow with Wyre (FC undated)) to encourage and enable the sustainable management and enjoyment of cultural and heritage forest landscapes. The projects focused on influencing behaviours, such as encouraging and increasing access to woodlands, volunteering to conserve habitats, volunteering to collect data on changes in biodiversity due to resource management changes, as well as encouraging participation in decision making. This links to FC policies focused on conserving ecosystems across landscapes, as well as policies targeted at enabling people to realise community and well-being benefits from wooded landscapes.

A number of specific forestry interventions and programmes have also focused on influencing or changing behaviours. For example, in recent years there has been a focus on encouraging activity in woodlands for health benefit. The Forestry Commission is a partner in the NHS Forest which aims to encourage sustainable and pro-health behaviours through the 'greening' of health care estates. FC has also worked with health

bodies to encourage General Practitioners to prescribe physical exercise in forests and woodlands (Snowdon, 2006; O'Brien and Snowdon, 2007). The National Institute for Health Research has recently funded an evaluation of the psychological impacts for deprived communities of the Woodlands in and Around Town initiative in Scotland (Ward Thompson, et al. 2010). Another example is provided by woodland-based Active England projects which aimed to increase physical activity levels amongst target groups (O'Brien and Morris, 2009; Morris and O'Brien, 2011).

Woodland grants are used as incentives to encourage a range of behaviours by woodland managers and owners. Management for biodiversity, the creation of new woodlands, management of woodlands for woodfuel and for public access are examples of target behaviours.

4. The policy cycle and behaviour change

The need for research to understand behaviours and how these might be influenced can be critical for policy success at different points in the policy cycle (Figure 1). For example, research may be needed to help define a specific issue by identifying the relevant key stakeholders, what issues they face and their motivations to behave in particular ways. Research can also be undertaken to understand the current situation (e.g. landowner attitudes and practices, infrastructure and technology issues) before moving on to develop and appraise different potential policy options (e.g. grant types, information provision, earned recognition). Policy interventions can be trialled through action based research approaches. For example, Defra are running a series of action based research projects to test innovative approaches for enabling pro-environmental behaviours. In one project the National Union of Students is assessing the effectiveness of encouraging energy efficient behaviour change amongst students living in halls of residence. Another project is testing pro-environmental techniques for promoting and encouraging textiles recycling in schools in Peterborough.

High quality planning and the effective delivery of policy interventions is critical. Monitoring and evaluation of behavioural interventions has become increasingly important, with calls for more robust approaches to be developed (National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), 2007; House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, 2012). For example, the Cabinet Office (Haynes et al. 2012) has recently published a paper that argues for more use of randomised controlled trials, widely used in the health sector, to test the effectiveness of different behavioural interventions.

NICE (2007: 12) guidance on behaviour change outlines three key topics related to any policy intervention that aims to change behaviour:

1 Be as specific as possible about its content. (this sits within the 'defining the issue' and 'understanding the situation' part of the policy cycle).

2 Spell out what is to be done, to whom, in what social and economic context and in what way. (relates to the 'develop and appraise options' and 'prepare for delivery' part of the policy cycle).

3 Make it clear which underlying themes will help make explicit the key causal links between actions and outcomes. (links to 'monitoring and evaluating' within the policy cycle).
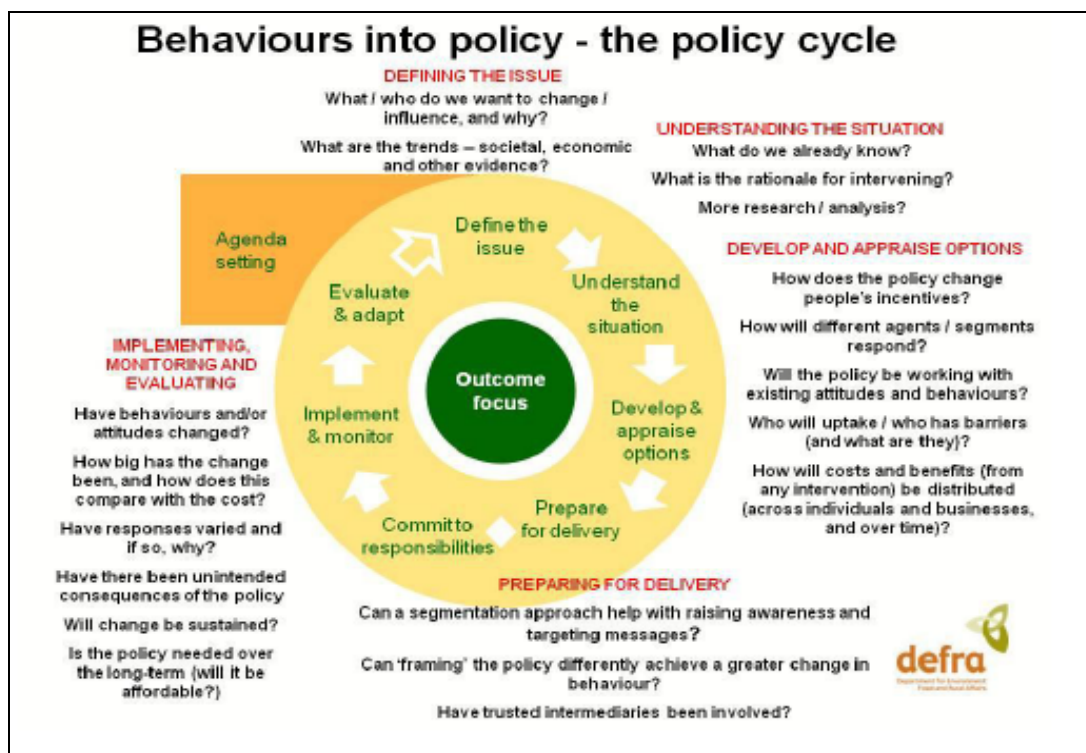

Figure 1. The policy cycle and behaviour (taken from Collier et al. 2010)

4.1. Policy instruments and mechanisms used by FC and the forestry sector

Table 3 outlines the key instruments and mechanisms used by the FC and by other parts of the forestry sector to maintain or change behaviours around woodland management and use. These are targeted at individuals, communities, land managers and organisations, and at the private, public and third sectors. This illustrates the wide range of approaches already used with some specific FC examples given.

Table 3. FC and forestry sector mechanisms that might influence, enable or change behaviours

Category	Mechanism	Example	Targeted behaviour
STRATEGIC	Policy – strategies, targets etc. that give a clear steer and leadership on particular issues	FC country forestry strategies FCS Woods for Health strategy and Woods for Health action plan. FCE Woodfuel strategy FCW Woodlands for learning and the learning country.	Encouraging the use of woods for healthy activity and well-being. Encouraging businesses and landowners to adopt sustainable forest management practices and engage in the renewable energy sector.
	Grant Schemes and Challenge funds	English Woodland Grant Scheme Rural Development Programmes Better Woodlands for Wales Challenge funds – WIAT (Woodlands in and Around Towns), Health WIG (Woodland Improvement Grant), Forest School WIG	Focus on stimulating particular types of sustainable management behaviour and land-use by private forest owners, organisations, communities and business.
	Licensing and regulation	Felling licence regime	To maintain Britain's existing forest cover and ensure forestry practice standards.
DELIVERY AND ENGAGE/ MENT	Targeted and funded interventions (includes Lottery Funded activity).	Active England, Big Tree Plant, WIAT, Heads of the Valleys and Western Valleys, Cyd Coed, Newlands (New Environments through woodlands)	These might have a focus on changing physical activity, improving local community spaces, encouraging use of local woods through woodland improvement. Changes to infrastructure, outreach, organised activities and led activities may also be part of these approaches.
	Education and learning schemes	Forest School, school trips to woods, ranger visits to schools, Forest kindergarten, Forest Education Initiative	Encouraging use of woods by children and parents. Encouraging greater understanding about forests and timber, and sustainable forest management.
	Organised events and activities	Nature walks Health walks	A focus on encouraging use and familiarity with woodlands and increasing well-being.
	Public engagement	Forest Design Planning Public consultations Involvement in woodland management decision-making	Encouraging people to get involved and contribute to decision-making.
	Forest resource, infrastructure and facilities development	Greening NHS Estates in Scotland NHS Forest Mountain bike trails Woodland parks and forest centres	Improving infrastructure, such as walking trails, mountain biking trails, facilities such as cafes, toilets.
	Partnership working	Neroche and Grow with Wyre Landscape Partnership Schemes	Delivering more through partnerships by increasing range and scope of activity and expertise.
TRANSFER OF KNOW-LEDGE / INFOR-MATION / EXPERTISE	Guidelines and toolkits	UK Forestry Standard and Guidelines Involving people in forestry toolbox Public engagement in forestry	Setting a standard outlines requirements for woodland owners and managers. Providing guidance to organisations about how to engage stakeholders and publics.
	Champions	Individuals who are proactive and passionate about creating change. Those involved in developing partnership projects (e.g. Neroche), community, recreation, education rangers that enthuse and inspire	Wide ranging depending on the project/activity but could include encouraging people to join a health walk, leading and enthusing volunteers, getting complex projects off the ground.
	Campaigns, promotions and information provision	Active Woods, Visit Woods.	Encouraging use of woods for healthy activity or encouraging the use of woods for a range of activities. Or increasing knowledge about what local woods people can visit.
	New/social media	Rate my woodland visit on FC web pages Phone apps to find forests to visit FC and other organisations' Facebook pages Campaign sites e.g. 38 degrees	Encouraging use and engagement with woodlands by providing information. Campaigns to protect access to woodlands.

Table 3 shows that a focus on influencing and changing behaviours is not new to the forestry sector. For example, grants and challenge funds are incentives that have long been used to encourage particular types of behaviour, such as management of woodlands for biodiversity or for public access. Lottery funding has provided opportunities and incentives for targeted approaches to encourage woodland use and physical activity in woodlands. Policy and strategy documents have provided vision and leadership, while guidance and toolkits have supported individuals and businesses in meeting particular standards or have provided ideas for new ways of working.

Summary

This document highlights that the focus on behaviour change is increasingly becoming a key dimension of governmental policies and that a range of government departments are working to embed behavioural approaches into a wide range of policy areas. Some departments are commissioning relevant research, providing guidance and have specialised teams of staff. The BIT team in the Cabinet Office has created a high profile for the development and testing of light touch, 'nudge' type approaches.

Recent research on behaviour change provides new theories and tools. Policy makers can draw on these tools to develop new interventions, or adapt existing ones, to reduce regulatory burden, aid compliance with existing regulation, or to avoid increases in regulatory burden to business. These can be tested, applied and researched to identify what works in different contexts and situations.

Key policy areas with a focus on behaviour change include the environment, energy, transport and health. 'Think pieces', evaluations, and research undertaken in the behaviour change arena are providing a range of principles and recommendations for policy makers who are developing and creating policies and considering the use of appropriate and effective policy instruments to encourage sustainable behaviours. These include:

- Multi-faceted interventions are more likely to be effective than single measure approaches (House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee, 2012).

- Robust evaluation of interventions is critical to know what worked and what did not work for different groups of people.

- Policy makers need to be cognisant that motivations for particular behaviours can vary significantly for different lifestyle groups (Barr et al. 2010).

- There are strong signals that encouraging positive behaviours through practically supported interventions will be more effective than focusing on existing problems (Elster, 2004).

- People may be 'locked' into particular behaviours because of factors relating to their social context. How to 'unlock' these behaviours remains a key area of uncertainty (Ekins, 2004).

- Participatory approaches can be 'highly motivational and effective in encouraging behaviour change' (Avineri and Goodwin, 2009: 18).

- Skills and capacity are needed within organisations to design, deliver and evaluate behaviour change interventions and policy instruments.

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