The ‘UH-Lafarge Sustainable Living Study’ was a research project into sustainable living undertaken by researchers at the University of Hertfordshire (UK). In disciplinary terms, researchers on the project had backgrounds in urban geography/sociology, housing studies and urban design; the study was funded by a multi-national building materials conglomerate (Lafarge, now LafargeHolcim); and the study drew on the expertise of a steering group comprised of academics and practitioners with expertise in architecture, urban planning, geography, housing development and urban design.

The research was designed as an international, comparative study which focused on the attitudes and practices of residents and other place-users in masterplanned developments. Research was undertaken in three developments in southeast England (UK) and two similar developments in the Sydney Metropolitan Area (Australia). For each of these case-study sites, claims had been made in formal design and development materials about the sustainability of the design and/or construction practices employed in the development of a given site. In these sites the project researchers explored what motivates sustainable behaviour and what acts as barriers to it among residents and other users. These masterplanned sites have had some purposefully sustainable features built in to them. We wanted to understand what actually happens when these sustainability-oriented design measures meet lived reality for new residents and other place-users, and what we might learn about helping make places sustainable in future.

A key finding of the research was that the ‘fit and forget’ idea for embedding sustainable infrastructure into dwellings and places did not always work as intended. Residents did not always respond in sustainable ways to ‘sustainable’ fabric. A ‘material culture’ understanding of sustainability as not just passively received, but rather deriving in part from the interplay between people and things (places and products) in practice, is therefore needed.

### SWOT Analysis

#### Strengths
- Interdisciplinary steering group were passionate about project and met regularly to ensure different disciplinary (and practitioner) views heard;
- A range of backgrounds suited to the research case – architects, urban designers, social scientists, industry professionals – included among project stakeholders.

#### Weaknesses
- Balance of disciplines uneven – advisors primarily designers and industry professionals, researchers primarily social scientists
- How to deal with issues of consistency (e.g. in data collection and analysis) in how research design applied between different researchers involved in project

#### Opportunities
- Project provided a very productive setting for exchange of ideas between disciplines and between the academy and industry
- Expert professional guidance grounded the research in ‘realities’ (financial, political, legal…) of masterplanning and housing development

#### Threats
- Expectations from the project (between researchers and Partnership members) not always aligned
- Longer-term funding insecure
- Managing different perspectives among project partners about which emerging lines of enquiry and (critical) perspectives should be pursued