



## BACKGROUND:

The UK Government's Foresight Programme is led by the Office of Science and Innovation. Foresight aims to provide challenging visions of the future to ensure effective strategies now. It does this by providing evidence to inform actions by Government, business and academia.

Foresight provides a core of expertise in science-based futures and unparalleled access to leaders in Government, business and science. The programme operates through a fluid, rolling programme that looks at 3 or 4 areas at any one time.

Projects fall into one of two general categories:

- An area of cutting edge science where the potential applications and technologies have yet to be considered or articulated;
- A key issue where science holds the promise of solutions.

The Foresight obesity project was announced in July 2005 and is due to run until Autumn 2007. Scoping work highlighted the need to bring together multiple evidence strands to inform a strategic view of this issue, working across the policy remit. Further information can be found at: [www.foresight.gov.uk](http://www.foresight.gov.uk)

## PROJECT AIM:

To produce a long-term vision of how we can deliver a sustainable response to the prevalence of obesity in the UK over the next 40 years.

Project Objectives:

- To use the scientific evidence base from across a wide range of disciplines to identify the broad range of factors that influence obesity
- To create a shared understanding of the relationships between key factors influencing levels of obesity and their relative importance
- To build on this evidence to identify efficacious solutions and effective change
- To analyse how future levels of obesity might change and the most effective future responses

Project Outputs:

- Reviews of scientific evidence in a form intelligible beyond the discipline and accessible to policy makers
- Model of obesity system (qualitative and quantitative analyses)
- Scenarios of the future
- Tools to assess future risk and the effectiveness of responses
- Identification of key challenges and engagement of those who can take them forward
- Enduring networks of people to continue dialogue as the issues evolve

## PROJECT METHODOLOGY:

### Qualitative Analysis

The project methodology is outlined in figure 1. The project has commissioned a series of short evidence reviews to inform the process which will be published in early 2007. A few more in-depth analyses have also been commissioned on the topics in the table opposite. Each review considers what current evidence from different science disciplines can tell us about obesity, and how our understanding might change over the next 25-30 years.

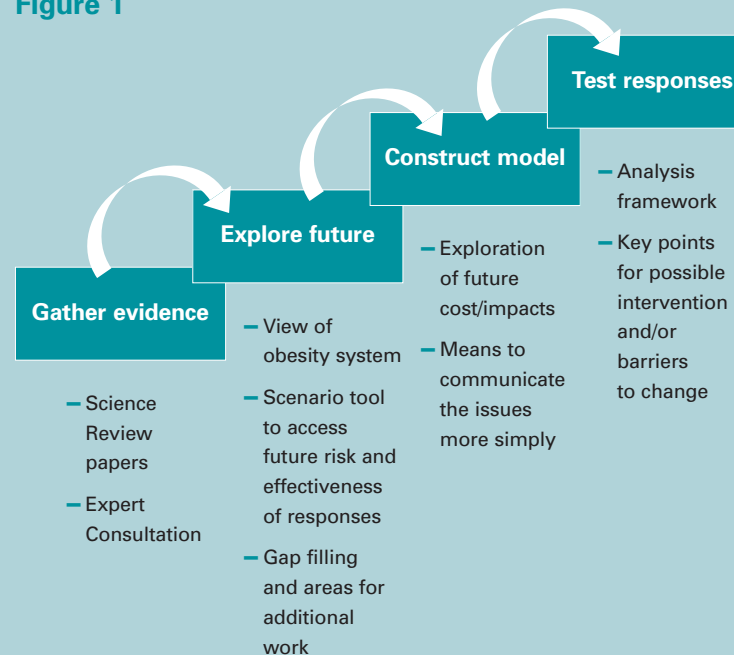
The evidence papers are supplemented by a systems mapping exercise aimed at crystallising our current understanding of:

- The multitude of factors influencing obesity
- Interactions between these factors
- Which factors are particularly important.

Parallel work seeks to generate scenarios of the future to explore the wider social, economic, environmental, technological and political drivers for change.

The two workstreams will combine to form an analysis tool which can be used to explore the impact of different interventions on the levels of obesity and associated health consequences.

Figure 1



In Depth Reviews	Scope
<b>Lifestyle change</b>	Overview of research into behaviour and motivation and how this helps us understand how to bring about behaviour change. Drawing from research into many lifestyle areas beyond health related topics.
<b>Physical environment</b>	Overview of research into the impact of the built environment on energy intake and expenditure.
<b>International comparisons</b>	An overview of the international picture including how different countries are responding to this issue. Also what current evidence can tell us about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● why some countries have lower obesity rates than others</li> <li>● why obesity levels in some countries are growing at a faster rate than others</li> <li>● what we can learn about the key drivers and determinants of obesity.</li> </ul>
<b>Impact of technology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Seeking to identify future opportunities where new technologies could help us manage our health and energy balance more successfully</li> <li>● Analysing future impact of new technologies on lifestyle and activity levels.</li> <li>● Exploring how different parts of society may adopt/reject these solutions</li> </ul>

### Quantitative Analysis

A separate quantitative analysis using cell-based modelling has been commissioned which aims to:

- Provide a quantitative assessment of future levels of obesity and the impacts and cost effectiveness of responses based on the project's scenarios
- Provide a demonstrator for the development of a model for long-term strategy planning in this area.