

## Northern Ireland Environment Link

### *Determining Environmental Priorities for the New Assembly*

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2011

La Mon Hotel and Country Club, Belfast

#### Politicians

Alex Attwood, Anna Lo, Danny Kinahan, Peter Weir, John Dallat, Willie Clarke, Steven Agnew

#### Alex Attwood

Referred to the Good Friday Agreement 1998. He acknowledged there were good people in government but found resistance from certain senior civil servants. He said limits were not being pushed. He believes he is in government not only to be in power but also to change society in a positive way. He wished to be judged by the standard, 'How far? How fast? Radical and rapid reform with a positive environmental agenda.' He then referred to Robert Kennedy's speech in the University of Johannesburg South Africa 1965 on Affirmation Day. Ultimately it is individuals who were responsible for shaping the past 40 years of history and it is the responsibility of all to shape the future in a positive way.

#### Agenda

- Town Centre Renewal – generates stability and jobs (eg Newcastle regeneration has resulted in 300% increase in footfall).
- Look at quick opportunities around Green Energy and Built and Natural Environment. An announcement on a new PPS is pending.
- Dunluce hides a 16<sup>th</sup> century village which is being excavated at the moment. He wishes the government to acquire this land and once excavated not to have it covered but to have it opened up.
- The need for planning permission to turn businesses around fast enough.
- Green Energy – to look at integration to maximise opportunities. Referred to a discussion with regard to Guernsey and Atlantic facing islands – what we can do about 'wind' and 'tidal' energy.
- Look at our own context – opportunities and push for wind turbines taking into account the Natural Heritage tensions. He acknowledged the need for greater pain if we are to raise our game.
- European Funding - Research innovation FP7 has 3 out of 5 years left to run. By Feb 2010 NI had drawn down enough funding for 80 projects. He stressed the need to quicken up our application process to maximise our funding opportunity not only for the next 3 years but also to prepare for 2014-2020 cycle. This might allow NI to maximise renewable energies and ultimately surpass renewable targets and cut down on CO<sup>2</sup> emissions.

## **National Parks Bill – legislation and practice**

- protect the environment and businesses
- premium
- create job opportunities

Transnational park in the Mourne, Slieve Gullion and the Cooley Mountains. Accelerated with community partnerships.

Is there an opportunity for rights to turf cutting? Given that 44-50% of people are living in fuel poverty could turf be used to help in the short term with respect for diversity?

## **RPA**

- 30% recycled waste in Belfast.
- Domestic waste – have the ability to accelerate opportunities.
- It is not credible that all agriculture, fishery and environment are fragmented across government.
- More joined up ways – farming, fishing, etc.
- Marine management needed.
- Marine Bill – issues resolved but needs to be taken further.
- Cluster groups to meet and discuss with minister – where this can be enhanced.

## **Climate Change Bill**

- Evidence for what is achievable.

## **Planning**

- Looking at Scottish planning – good and quick process consistent with evidence. 3-5 month cycles of planning applications compared to 3-5 years in Northern Ireland.

No reason why as part of work to build in to the life of the department a requirement of paid graduation placements and training opportunities.

***Answered the following questions:***

**Mike Harnett – Grid infrastructure:**

DETI issue not DOE but recognises this is a bigger issue. Has spoken with A Foster re turbines and sea energy.

**Brigid O’Neill – Environmental Education:**

*Has asked for a paper on this and the broader issues. Issues with DE at present, will come back on this.*

**Declan Allison – Climate Change Bill:**

*Mentioned this in speech. Analyst group made up from all departments meeting regularly. Hopes to reach targets.*

**Speeches by Committee members:**

**Anna Lo – Chair Environment Committee**

- Delighted to be at conference and to learn from delegates.
  - Has completed 4 committee meetings and covered a lot of issues. Very wide remit.
  - DoE – Department of Everything!
  - Appreciation of eNGOs – key role to play in protecting NI environment and habitats.
  - Eager to learn how the environment committee works and its role in the government system.
- 
- Consider and advise the department of budgets and spending and get priorities right.
  - Primary and secondary legislation – hugely important in influencing laws prior to being made.
  - Initiate legislation in doing more.
  - Make recommendations.
  - Checks and balances of DoE.
- 
- Mandate – budget and jobs within and external to department.
  - Hear more on climate change and how to reform local government.
  - Ensure transport in rural areas is applied consistently.
  - Welcomes commitment from NIEL and NGOs.

**Danny Kinahan – UUP – Private Secretary to Danny Kennedy DRD**

- Pleased to be on environment committee.

- Recognises the environment stretches across all departments.
- Planning and 3<sup>rd</sup> party appeals.
- Marine Bill.
- Clean Energy.
- Committee workings.

#### **Peter Weir – DUP – Chief Whip in DUP**

- Longest serving willing volunteer on environment committee.
  - Constructive and critical friend of minister.
  - Support minister – facilitate and speed up decisions.
  - Add caution and offer alternatives.
  - Listen to external experts.
- 
- Environmental education – awareness of environment
  - Environmental protection and enhancement – woodland increase
  - Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill - protection of species, effective enforcement
  - Planning – local government level
  - Waste – move on agenda and progress

#### **John Dallat – SDLP**

- Planning – move on
- Education – persuade CCEA to stop hiring private jets and look at environmental education in schools
- ‘Can do, will do’
- Has encouraged road safety
- Save coastguard station in Bangor
- Confident committee will work positively, coming together in partnerships
- See local council reform

#### **Willie Clarke – SF**

- National Parks – all Ireland, taking into account the concerns of farmers, access, etc
- Climate Change Bill
- Planning Bill – roll out aside RPA
- Sustainability issues – forest cover
- Natural and Community Planning
- Bio energy, anaerobic energy and offshore
- Marine Bill
- Allotments
- Tyre disposal
- IPA
- 3<sup>rd</sup> party appeal

## **Steven Agnew – Green Party**

(not on environment committee)

- Green New Deal
- Corporation tax – opposed to cuts in assembly
- Feed in tariffs
- IPA – keep on agenda
- Planning – underpin all (PPS24 in particular)

## **Anna Lo – Alliance**

- Push environment agenda up in committee and department
- Learn more from environment sector
- Passionate but needs to learn – open door
- IPA – across all departments – has to have clout to make departments work
- Marine Bill
- Climate Change Bill
- Green New Deal – wind and tidal energy
- Planning Bill – 3<sup>rd</sup> party appeal

## Climate Change roundtable discussion notes

**Chair: Gary McFarlane**

**Government Representative: Brendan Forde**

**Notetaker: Neil Halliday**

### **Legislation:**

- NI can implement a carbon trading scheme using UK climate change act
- If climate change act will not encourage political leadership, what will?
- Climate Change act will provide gravitas and leadership – there was some disagreement that this was the best way to do it; for example, legislation would set targets, but we need to be very clear about how we set targets and what we want to put in legislation. Other contributors stated that there is no point legislating without a clear action plan for implementation, this is more important than the legislation itself. Starting points need to be identified
- Legislating dictates that actions must happen
- The British government is the first to commit to statutory climate change targets, with the possibility for prosecution for failing to meet targets
- Legislation is not as simple as picking a target/number and running with it without understanding complex interactions
- How would NI climate change act differ from UK act?
- We are legally bound by the UK act, but because of devolution there is no enforcement
- UK assessment of climate change to be published this year, NI must produce an adaptation programme. Do we need to replicate the powers in the UK act?
- A framework is needed for departmental targets under the Climate change act
- Judicial review can act as a means of enforcement – would rely on an ‘embarrassment factor’ to enforce the government

### **Built Heritage**

- Climate change will have a massive impact on built heritage
- There has been an assessment of climate change impacts on coastal heritage sites, but not on Belfast!

### **Agriculture**

- Current policy does not allow farmers to reduce GHG emissions. There is a contradiction between maximising food production and reducing carbon footprints
- Many farmers want to use GMOs. Farmers should not be paid for not producing food. Inputs should be used more effectively
- NI has a small average field size, leading to inefficiency in farming. One delegate proposed that we double average field size in the next five years, but legislation prohibits this. The economics of scale in agriculture must be recognised
- Agriculture needs to produce less meat
- We need to drive innovation in rural technology
- It may be possible to use a 2015 baseline to measure agricultural outputs

## Targets

- There are few specific, achievable targets – a climate change bill with targets will provide political leadership
- Northern Ireland needs:
  - An annual carbon budget
  - to stop thinking negatively, focus instead on the many, immeasurable positives from climate change mitigation measures
  - climate change scenario planning
  - culture change and behaviour change
- How do we assess benchmarks and how do we know if we are hitting targets?
- NI can achieve 35% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2025
- DECC have already carried out a GHG audit of NI, we should continue to outsource this task to DECC
- Some departments don't see themselves as part of climate change targets

## Economy

- Climate change is too important an issue to wait scientific perfection – if a job is really worth doing it may be worth doing badly!
- Climate change IS the economy; we need to make it clear that they cannot be separated. The Green New Deal is an example of an all-encompassing policy
- The financial incentives of reducing energy consumption have not been emphasized enough
- Dilemma – internalising the external costs of environmental degradation would go a long way to solving the climate change crisis, but would impoverish many people
- More creative taxation is needed – Norwegian mining and oil taxes were used to public good, not to subsidise polluting industries – we should learn from this and similar examples of best practice. Other delegates argued that taxation has nothing to do with climate change, and that taxation was merely targeting individuals for being successful
- The Green New Deal will encourage departmental cooperation. A carbon-neutral government estate is still do-able
- Consumerism needs to be challenged

## Actions and priorities

- Actions do not always follow the action plan
- Need to change attitudes that NI is too small and therefore insignificant in tackling climate change – seize the opportunities arising from it
- A specialist climate change team is needed; too much EU funding has been missed – a dynamic cross-departmental, cross-sectorial team could chase funds
- No government department is taking central leadership for climate change, responsibility is spread over four departments. Government could establish working groups with key people from each department and create 3-5 year plans
- Climate change will not be a political priority for at least 10 years because of continued focus on sectarian politics and security issues. The best we can do until then is more of what we have already been doing
- Address causes rather than impacts

- Mitigation and adaptation are inseparable
- There is a risk that if left for too long, adaptation will be unmanageable
- Flood plans have already been created, we can build on these – possibly use them as an example of best practice for scenario planning?
- ‘Environmental priorities’ is too narrow a term – this is an issue for whole society

### **Miscellaneous**

- Climate Change is killing people in NI right now, but not in obvious ways – food prices and fuel poverty.
- There is a direct link between security issues, other concerns and climate change
- Every local council are should conduct an energy audit – Cookstown council have conducted a similar audit, and found that they could potentially be 76% energy self-sufficient
- Vested interests are a massive problem – they are pushing grid infrastructure in the wrong direction, this will harm NI with no economic benefit:

## **Built Heritage**

Mal Conway – Chairperson

Brian Williams – Government Representative

Iona Meyer – Notetaker

### **Resources**

- Need a central resource to hold archives
- Reaction to funding cuts, what improvements would we like to make
- The Monuments and Building Record needs to be reinstated with the public allowed full access
- Still get people leaving the table and valuable information is not getting into the public domain
- We need written records – curators at museums – who takes responsibility – who funds
- Heritage is important to the Environment, in order to protect it we have to record it
- Provide adequate support to private owners of listed buildings to ensure their protection

### **Promotion, investment and tourism**

- Outreach days are stopping
- In Northern Ireland we are way behind on marketing – Giants Ring a good example
- Politicians need to invest in built heritage
- Some of our small towns are losing character - we're not investing enough
- Acquiring the land at Dunluce will be outstanding when it happens, and will attract many tourists

### **Planning**

- Planning seeks to control development, we need more investment which in turn will lead to more building jobs
- PPS6 needs to be revised to ensure developers and the public achieve full benefit from all archaeological excavations

### **Miscellaneous**

- The group started by welcoming the Ministers speech
- Joined up thinking is needed to deal with challenges
- The impact climate change has on archaeological sites
- Enforcement – needs more teeth – who takes responsibility, the material needs to be excavated before the developer moves in

## Freshwater

*Provide resources for the full implementation of the Water Framework Directive to support a sustainable approach to water management.*

### **Funding:**

- **The 2011-2015 Assembly should seek to implement the WFD by ensuring it is fully funded.**
  - Key piece of legislation – WFD – funding for this was to be £4m but potentially only £1m has been confirmed for the first year.
  - DoE needs to be innovative in their funding approach and seek to maximise existing funds. One suggestion may be to set up small teams to pursue potential funding streams (both large and small).
  - Given the lack of available funding, DoE recognises the need for government to be working with organisations on the ground, given the NGO knowledge and expertise, if we are to achieve many of our WFD requirements.
  - NGOs believe there is a requirement for a memorandum of understanding between government and NGOs across NI in relation to funding – who can do what? Who is responsible? Similarly many funders are reluctant to fund what they believe government should be doing, therefore if conflicts arise, a MOU may resolve many of these issues
  - Improved interaction between the DoE and the Barrosa Taskforce should be undertaken as soon as possible in order to investigate the possibility of the drawdown of European support for the development of local freshwater projects.
  - The single use carrier bag levy may provide some financial support but the amount available may be unpredictable and dependency on this funding stream is not sustainable in the longer-term.
  - NI Water recognises the need for cross border work and projects to look at bigger pots of funding.
  - NI Water referred to the Water Framework Directive and that NI Water is to meet fresh water targets. It is reviewed by the Utility Regulator in order to determine funding. NI Water has recently had a significant cut to their budget. As the majority of its funding is ring-fenced to provide clean water and make improvements to it, there are insufficient funds available for other projects such as waste water treatment. NI Water would like to see the mechanism for funding being stabilised by government in order to sufficiently deliver projects. Perhaps a funding amount to be spent over a 4 year period rather than money having to be spent within each year. This would allow for extremes, such as flooding and any funds not being used in one year could then be carried over to the next.

### **Enforcement and monitoring:**

- **The Assembly should commit to adequate levels of monitoring and enforcement supplemented by supported community initiatives to ensure compliance with policies.**

- DoE stated that currently NIEA staff conduct river walks to seek out problems and pollution. The number of catchment staff has also increased.
- NGOs suggested a change in staff routines from office work in order that the number of staff available to help with on the ground monitoring is increased. Currently there are more staff indoors awaiting the results than those actually carrying out the tests. This would allow staff to build on skills and should result in greater efficiency.
- While DoE staff presently use severity levels to prioritise work, NGOs suggested that there was a need to review this approach as what are regarded as low severity problems can occur often and therefore present as a more significant problem requiring more action than afforded under their low severity status .
- The Catchment Officer should be made aware of all findings and become the focal point for all DoE and NGO communication in dealing with specific pollution incidents which would lead to greater consistency in how incidents are dealt with. Low severity incidents occurring at high levels of frequency would be picked up and action instigated.
- NI Water recognised the need for improved monitoring as the need for investment is informed by available data.
- NGOs suggested greater commitment was therefore required in the longer-term on low flow monitoring given its implication for managing pollution. Other NGO suggestions included:
  - Improved enforcement of existing monitoring
  - Utilisation of remote sensors
  - Passage monitors be allowed to remain in streams for a month or more to measure pesticide incidence
  - Improved follow-up of traditional sampling
  - Greater utilisation of local groups to add to eyes and ears and help with investigations
  - Make pollution fines more proportionate to the level of the crime
  - Directly target polluters using a carrot and stick approach to halt pollution
  - Encourage purchasers of agricultural products (Supermarkets, restaurants etc) to ensure that their suppliers are behaving responsibly and adhering to strict codes of good-environmental practice

**Abstraction:**

- **Abstraction must be sustainable and take account of the full impact on river habitats to afford reasonable protection of the environment.**
  - The number of abstraction licence applications is a matter of great concern.
  - More creative thinking needed and agencies and NGOs to work together to realise efficiencies.
  - Sustainable Catchment Planning is urgently required involving all sectors
  - The main issue is main water treatment upgrades. For NI Water the massive need for drinking water takes priority over the environment. A last resort would be construction of a new dam
  - In terms of restoring bogs and undertaking landscape projects, NI Water can manage these projects on their own lands but not on the land they don't currently own,

particularity in the west. It was suggested that NI Water liaise with Forest Service who own vast areas of land in order to further advance these projects.

- A further suggestion was that universities be utilised to abstract data and deliver information. Universities and academic institutes could look at how waterways could be protected.
- There was political acknowledgement of the duplication/ overlap between the many government departments dealing with freshwater issues. A combined approach was therefore needed.
- Currently there is no formal link to planning and licensing of septic tanks. Septic tanks are not currently monitored by NIEA. This is potentially a massive problem as there are 90,000 tanks registered not to mention the number not registered. Suggestions as to how to tackle the problem included:
  - For the thousands of new dwellings in planning – proposal - discharge consent prior to planning approval
  - Promotion of reed beds where viable
  - The possible devolving of monitoring of septic tanks to local councils
  - Educate householders as to the impact of detergents on tanks as well as an information campaign on how to maintain your septic tank
  - Investigation of a possible grant scheme to replace existing malfunctioning septic tanks Perhaps through NI Water

#### **Funding:**

- **The Northern Ireland Assembly should ensure plans and associated implementation funds are in place to deliver conservation targets in water dependent Protected Areas.**
  - Over - reliance on plastic bag levy to cover shortfall in government funding. Not sustainable long-term as money will decrease over the years as the public becomes more educated in reuse of bags.
  - Government acknowledged that as with any levy there are challenges and risks and a lot of work still needs to be done.
  - WFD – is a really important piece of legislation with both many economic and environmental benefits. However new thinking is required in terms of both funding its implementation and on development of a partnership approach between government and NGOs to ensure its correct application
  - There was recognition of the need for long-term strategies – as opposed to the current 4 year approach with new Ministerial priorities in each 4 year term. Under investment in the environment will have a long-term knock on effect on other departments.
- **A duty to promote a sustainable flood management approach should be explicitly stated within all departmental policies.**
  - The agricultural sector believes that as the amount of land available will decrease there is therefore the need to maximise landuse. However farmers still do have the capacity to grow and look at sustainable drainage systems

#### **Action:**

*FWTF to meet with NIEA soon to find out state of play and thrash out issues discussed.*

## **Sustainable development**

### **Education**

- Capacity of teachers to teach SD and possible involvement of eNGOs in teaching
- Priority of teaching SD in the light of pressure faced by schools to perform well on literacy and numeracy and the engagement of teachers to teach SD
- Schools and Government should normalise sustainable behaviour
- Striking the right kind of balance between teaching the concepts and definitions of sustainable development and teaching specific issues within SD and refer to them as being part of SD
- Education of adults in SD is needed

### **Communication strategy**

- SD is a very broad term and evidence of progress is not so visible. It calls for key indicators which differ according to which contexts they are measuring SD in
- Indicators are related too much to governmental structure/government departments versus being related to SD

### **Energy**

- Legislation is a hinder to sell heat
- The resource of small scale energy producing units should be used

## **Marine**

Chair: Richard Devlin  
Government Representative: Rosemary Bradley  
Note Taker: Ben Diamond

### **Marine Bill**

- Disappointment that a NI Marine Bill has taken so much time to progress.
- While its arrival would be very welcome it would require active enforcement.
- There needs to be something in the Bill to prevent the overturning of stones when collecting shellfish.
- Fisheries powers should be contained within the Bill.
- The Marine Bill will not deal with food safety.

### **MMO**

- It is difficult to find out what is going on within the different government departments.
- Aquaculture sector believe there is a need to expand production and have concerns over any potential hindrance to this expansion.
- Aquaculture efficiency could however be improved with the suggestion that a MMO may help with this process.

### **MPAs**

- Improved linkages are required between marine spatial plans, MPAs and with other sectors.
- Knowledge needs to be collated from a range of departments, authorities and agencies.

### **Enforcement**

- Real concerns that current legal protection is not being enforced e.g. shellfish harvesting in Strangford lough.
- ASSI legislation is regarded as having no 'teeth'. Any future legislation needs to have sufficient powers that will be actively enforced.

### **Resources**

- The issue is not solely about legislation. We need to ensure that there are sufficient powers and resources to enforce the legislation.
- In relation to Marine Spatial Planning, concerns were expressed as to whether there was suitable aquatic experience within the planning team and that marine spatial planning was likely to be a learning process for planners.
- The availability of data remains an issue. An early approach is required to consolidate data across departments. It is important that everyone knows what data

is available and that it is available in a user-friendly format for other departments. A proposal was made to combine Environmental Policy and Natural Heritage data in order to identify existing gaps. Other departments and agencies can then be contacted to see if they can help fill these data gaps or if they have other resources that could be utilised.

- There is the potential for an MMO to pool this data.

## Transport

### Legislation

- The Regional Transport Strategy consultation is due to close 28<sup>th</sup> of June. Sub-regional Transport Plan cut the cycling budget cut by 90%(some of NIEL's issues already been addressed here)
- Focus on urbanisation for sustainable transport.
- Sub-group working on transport, collective and individual approach.
- Translink should meet with public.
- There is a continuing question about the 'permeability' of government.
- DOE set targets but can have little influence elsewhere. There is no point in setting targets if details not known, need for transport planning expertise.
  - Have to deliver but don't have the levers to do so, not clear on sustainable transport.
- Reporting people for excessive pollution from vehicles; is there a method to do this? Would it be similar to littering?
- Translink monopolise transport in NI. Privatisation has not worked in England, would it work in NI? No profit in rural buses.
- Transport planning can be ignored.
  - Possible 20 mph speed limit across urban areas?
  - Big health and safety issues with transport.

### Education

- Are we sending mixed messages to young people? Why should they use public transport? Students can cause congestion in Belfast. Lack of teaching from a young age, parents often will drive children to primary school, need for a change in ideology
- Education and transport - Secondary school often far away
- Lack of safety for cyclists, need for awareness from other motorists.
- People's choices can be unsustainable, not driving to town, should be embracing urban living.
  - Shift to public transport needs change in public opinion - make it work for the people
- Should the service be provided then wait for people to use it?
- People will not change if alternative is not easier.

### Economy

- Budget issues in many areas within transport. Ulsterbus service was improved and many services were extended, but many were withdrawn as were not used enough.
- Is transport about providing a service or is it all about profit/money?
- Cost of public transport
  - Is it too expensive? Cost compared to car? Can depend on the service
  - Similar problems in other European countries; there is also an opportunity to learn from other countries e.g. Freiburg, Germany
- Cost of A5 (£1 billion), to save 20/25 mins -Is it wanted or needed? Takes money from other services, walking, cycling etc. A5 is unsustainable.

- Others argue that A5 is a key priority for the west of NI, encourage business. In west there is a real lack of public transport. If sufficient public transport, people's opinion may change.
  - Building new roads doesn't get to route of problem. Benefits of A5 mainly business and freight

### **Urban Transport**

- Pilot schemes for 'park and ride' services could be used in smaller regional towns/areas.
  - Do schemes make financial sense when not in big areas?
- -Is park and ride unfit for purpose? Only benefits certain people. Little mention in Belfast Metro Transport Plan. Often 'park and ride' doesn't encourage usage of public transport.
- Try to improve accessibility for those without cars.
  - Park and share scheme?
  - Cycling incentives, use of portable bikes.
- If cycling into town, where do you store your bike?
  - Need to be more cyclist friendly, learn from other countries.
- Metro service in Belfast is inefficient, in order to get to certain places you have to go into the centre and back out.
- Stop cars from going into city centre. Take tough line and restrict access. Make driving to centre in car uncomfortable, Edinburgh

### **Rural Transport**

- Rural transport, share buses links to isolated people. Many problems with rural isolation.
- Resources limited for rural transport, some routes are duplicated.
- Car dependant society, many people live in remote areas, easier to use car, lack of routes for public transport. Consumers make their own decision to live in remote areas. Can complain about lack of services, but was their choice where to live.
- People in rural areas can have least choice.
  - Improve rural bus service.
- Utilising government vehicles, post-office buses.
  - Community transport association

### **Actions/Priorities**

- Transport a major part of sustainable development.
  - Method of moving forward and progressing.
- Professional transport planning, with provision for electric vehicles and alternative fuels.
- Transport should be based on sustainability - train is most sustainable option, best impact with least money
- More pedestrian friendly environment can help.

- Greater communication between urban/rural, transport links. Transport network can mean long commute for buses. Better planned development, less pressure on resources.
- People can be quick to blame the transport system
- Green infrastructure
- Transport model which take account of policy changes?
- Railway has declined, small network, bus has taken priority.
- Lower speeds mean less damage from HGV on roads.
  - Coordination needed to meet GHG target, cross-departmental action plan.
  - Transport, energy production and agriculture are major sources of emissions
- Electric cars - Suitable for shorter distances. Recharging stations/infrastructure key. Cost compared to conventional cars? Financial incentives towards electric cars. Electric cars may prove to be cheaper over time, initial costs higher

### **Miscellaneous**

- Cost of renewables will decrease.
- Broadband in rural areas not sufficient yet, people could work from home
  - Increase knowledge of working from home, video calling (Skype)
- Cost of more sustainable lifestyle, cost of fuel/parking
  - More flexible with car, more time with public transport.
- Companies determine optimum speeds for freight/haulage vehicles
  - Half of emissions come from private vehicles, 3<sup>rd</sup> from freight.
- Is transport all about numbers, is it quantifiable?
- Road capacity, there is a need to ensure people will actually use services provided.

## **Waste**

Eric Randall – Chairperson

Oonagh Warke – Government Representative

Karen Nicholson – Notetaker

### **Targets and Priorities**

- Different priorities trade off against each other.
- Targets have stinging impact if we don't meet them.
- If we hit 20% recycled materials we should hit target but not guaranteed.
- IKEA recycle 70% of its waste. Supermarkets need to get to this level and higher.
- IKEA shows what can be done.
- There needs to be a prioritisation of dealing with waste.
- There is a risk we are not going to meet targets.
- Targets – local authorities need to meet 20% target – how would that be enforced for local authorities?
- If environmental targets aren't met then this has economic repercussions – a precautionary element.

### **Best practice abroad**

- Denmark an example of best practice – move beyond seeing England and Wales as role models and follow Denmark's example – be more adventurous in our waste processing plans.
- Germans wonder why we are still talking about our waste and not doing.
- Different waste policies out there – a unified policy is needed – we need to focus on that.
- Cologne runs all its buses of waste energy.
- How can we get best practice examples from England and other European counties to NI?

### **Increasing participation**

- Consumer behaviour needs to be looked at.
- Infrastructure is very important but problems begin with consumer habits.
- This issue is meaningless in parts of Belfast – other issues to be dealt with e.g. rioting on Lower Newtownards Road, fuel poverty, social deprivation – people have other things to worry about.
- People need to be incentivised in order to meet targets.
- Belfast City Council is doing good work but not reaching results, therefore do they need to try something more effective?
- Where does the incentive come from?
- What is the incentive for local council to do more?
- Simply issuing penalties ruins morale.
- Public needs to see environmental achievements in order to give support to council.
- Local government puts people off – public are more likely to listen to and follow the example of a neighbour or local green champion rather than council.

- In Belfast area people do not like council representatives – see them as representatives of state and won't do what they say.
- Will people be more diligent about recycling if the economics make sense?
- Sometimes when system is changed to suit the customer, that has most impact on behaviour – e.g. if bins are changed more often to suit customer then their behaviour may change.
- It is important to create the impression within society that to recycle is the normal right way things should be done.
- The word 'waste' is a misnomer – waste is a positive thing – a resource. When waste goes into the market it is a resource.
- There is a negativity in the media about recycling – the message is therefore being lost – image issue is of great importance.
- The problem with people not recycling is not education. People know they should not be littering, fly tipping etc.
- What should be done about people who know what to do but don't, e.g. the students in the Holyland behind Queen's?
- Education needs to be backed up with something more robust!
- Despair about people who simply don't care about waste was expressed, e.g. the Holyland at Queen's. Students are environmentally educated as it is part of the school curriculum; however they still badly litter their environment. They need educated about civic responsibility.
- Belfast Hills Partnership carried out a survey of their area and noted an improvement in fly tipping.
- Sometimes the most important thing is that the recycling rate is being reached and not where the waste is ending up e.g. developing countries.

### **Infrastructure**

- Recycling and waste management is economically beneficial but setting up the infrastructure takes time.
- If we are trying to achieve perfect recycling rates we must have the proper infrastructure to achieve this.
- Should there be an all-Ireland waste management system?
- Good collection infrastructure necessary for good product.

### **Energy from Waste**

- AD is a big investment.
- Importance of managing the inputs and outputs in AD.
- Not just energy produced at the end of the process.
- England introduced loans rather than grants.
- Contracts in England last for 15-20 years.
- Belfast City Council finds it cheaper at the moment to compost.
- 50-60% of people in Belfast are composting in brown bin.
- In the Belfast area the green waste is composted, bagged and sold as Rosey Lee.
- Developing energy from food and agricultural waste – energy we can draw back.
- No sizeable AD system yet in NI.
- AD is common on mainland Europe.

- Combine energy policy with waste strategy to attach onto grid.
- The economics will always influence decisions taken about a solution to the waste problem.
- There needs to be information available for citizens re AD and biogas - waste education needs to clarify that waste is a positive commodity not a threat to a community.
- Audit should be done of every council area re renewable energy – this could highlight new business opportunities for community.
- Sharing of energy – important to connect businesses so that energy can be shared e.g. companies could sell on their waste to heat another business or energy produced can be sold to another business.

### **Agriculture**

- In the farming community, waste is discussed, but when a person wants to do something about it they are blocked by policies.
- How can this be fed back to the Environment Committee?
- Problems in agriculture re AD projects – can't get funding for new technologies, passive infrastructure problems.

### **Packaging and Consumer waste**

- Wrapping is a major source of waste.
- The consumer is not totally at fault – wrapping is produced by producers and what do consumers do with it?
- Producers need to be lobbied about packaging.
- Supermarkets are well aware that they need to be recycling behind the scenes
- Suggestion – take wrapping back to the supermarket – take wrapping that can't be recycled to customer services.
- How do we tie in commercial and industrial waste? This has no specific sector for collection.
- Industrial waste has a huge amount of variety of material to recycle.
- Businesses don't have one system of collection – very complex area.
- How can this be brought into a whole to reduce waste?
- Discussion is currently taking place about how industrial waste is dealt with as issue is so complex.

### **Pollution**

- Concern at what is happening in the countryside.
- Pollution is draining down through land into rivers.
- Run-off and fly tipping are big conservation issues.

### **Major challenges**

- We need to challenge consumerism – challenge the need to consume so much.
- A cultural shift in our attitudes is needed.
- The full resource impact of the purchase of one item is not understood by the public – full cognisance not taken.
- The way we are living needs challenged as root issue.

- We live in a 'society of stuff'.
- The cost of disposing of clothes should be included in the purchase price.
- If items are taxed to include their disposal how would that impact on poorer people?

### **Miscellaneous**

- The impact of new technologies will not be seen within the life of a parliament.
- The momentum of new technologies needs to be sustained now.
- AD system is in place in farms but can't take waste from other farms or households because of legislation.
- How do people living in flats and small houses cope with the amount of bins?
- This is a physical problem of space for these residents.
- The integrity of recycling – can people be sure that their good efforts of conscientious recycling are being dealt with properly?
- AD plants for farms should be streamlined – process to establish the plant – the body that takes the project on and the steps in the process.
- Nature doesn't produce waste!
- If not recycled, waste will cost more in the future due to landfill costs.
- Landfilling restricted by EU.
- £100/tonne if sent to landfill next year.
- £220/tonne if recycled.
- This means that recycling is economically beneficial and helps carbon emissions.
- Infraction is an issue at EU level.
- Recycling makes money – why would we not do it?
- Why can't this be legislated for here?
- Factionalism over the years is not helpful.
- Trade off between quality and quantity needs debated.
- Will the market for certain plastics improve? Difficult issue - mix of plastics is very complex
- Eric – amount of waste generated per household has dropped.

### **Local Government**

- There is still confusion out there as to what to put in each bin.
- There is a lack of uniformity between councils and what they can recycle – it's the same in ROI.
- If a local council is bound to a contract of what it must recycle, it cannot break it until the end of the contract.

## **Planning**

### **Governance Issues**

- There is a need for greater support and coordination within the environment sector.
- Need to allow further engagement for people to build their communities – eg the health sector is doing this more. Community planning can start to address this. What is needed is people at the centre with structures to allow participation. The councils need to deliver this in a better way through RPA. Concept of sustainable communities should be a priority
- Concern surrounding RPA implementation
  - A robust planning policy framework is needed to ensure consistency. Future roles must be clear
  - What can community planning actually achieve? Will this include sustainable transport planning etc
  - Is there a risk in the handover to councils?
  - How will a plan-led council system operate when there is incomplete area plan coverage?
  - Do we need to address planners training, particularly in the process of RPA?
  - At council level one individual may have responsibility for decisions – will there be consistency across councils?

#### **FEEDBACK**

- A suggested pilot programme will be rolled out for councils – this will act as a test bed to identify any initial issues. A shadow arrangement will then take place, where councils are in position but not actually functioning for a period of time.
- Right policies and right plans are needed with a high level of capacity building.
- Consensus in support for local council structure of governance
- Minister has made the comment that he is seeking to learn from the Scottish system, which is welcomed. We must be careful that rigour is not put in jeopardy for speed – how do we create a balance?
  - Use the skills within the department in the right place – structures and procedures at present are making this more difficult.
  - There is an issue that sections of the department are passing responsibility and this can cause delays to the process.
- Fees system should reflect the work that goes into an application (currently being addressed as part of fees review)
  - Some people are using the validation process as a checklist to provide the information needed in hope of reducing their work to prepare an application

### **Planning Policy Statements**

- A review of PPS21 would be welcomed but it needs to be based on evidence; consideration needs to be given to built heritage, environment etc but also to the needs of rural communities

#### **FEEDBACK**

- The environment committee has called for a review of PPS 21 and the Minister has indicated that he will consider this.
- It is still quite early days for PPS21 and it needs to be rolled out.

- PPS2 draft is contradictory in terms and needs to be addressed
  - There is a need to simplify this to manage complex issues and promote consistency
  - Conflict of PPS2 terms is opening up the JR problem
- The Minister has mentioned that PPS24 will be reconsidered – it is important to aim towards the delivery of a good environment and a good economy. Planning is already in favour of the developer so emphasis of PPS24 is too strong.
  - Consider development that can help both – revenue generated from development should be channelled back to fund environmental protection
  - Planners should become more proactive – use more positive language to help enable sustainable development practice
  - A slice of tourism/environment funds or some sort of levy should go back to fund environmental protection (something like National Trust model)
  - Areas such as AONBs are not significantly recognised in Northern Ireland for their value

### **Renewable Energy**

- Minister has stated his wish to push forward renewable energy – concerned about the visual and habitat impacts of wind turbines
  - 16 applications for wind turbines in Belfast Hills Area – worrying that these may be pushed through
  - Wind industry and structures are as much a problem as planning – subsidy system is very attractive and is not necessarily the answer to promote good renewable energy development
  - Strategic planning is required – need to coordinate prioritisation of development where wind resource is best in line with supporting grid infrastructure

### **Enforcement**

- Enforcement of TPOs is not enough considering the need for woodland and deciduous trees
  - Developers are able to pay the fines without too much concern – they need to be heavier
  - Could a fixed penalty scheme be implemented to avoid having to go to courts
  - The judicial process appears to be weakening the enforcement of TPOs
  - The department is currently reviewing fines
  - Planning at the local level could start to address this and enforcement will be the power of the councils (system should be more engaged)
- There is a concern over the neighbour notification process of current planning system
  - The RoI system should be replicated (signs posted on the site for all to see)
- Need for greater enforcement of legislation; retrospective planning permission is not acceptable.
  - Enforcement is ultimately with the courts and is out of the department's control.
  - Robust monitoring and enforcement required, particularly in relation to conditions/informatives made on planning permission, such as Rivers, Archaeology etc

- Planning enforcement gap has been impacted by staff levels and reduced revenue from applications

#### FEEDBACK/PROPOSALS

- Government should be clear about mitigation and look towards ‘polluter pays’ legislation
- Leverage of economic benefit into environmental protection fund

#### Marine

- Planning permission has been given for applications that go beyond low water mark despite the fact that it should be passed to Marine licensing at this point
    - Is there an issue with uncertainty in different areas of responsibility?
    - Need for greater cohesive working between and within sections of DOE (eg Planning and NIEA)
- #### FEEDBACK/PROPOSALS
- Some form of consultation/memo to outline where responsibility lies and who needs to be aware of development proposals
  - In relation to the Marine Bill and Marine Spatial Planning there is need for joined-up working. What is the status of PPS20 and how can this seek to guide the framework
    - No ongoing work at the moment as focus has turned to the Marine Plan

#### Others

- Planning and built heritage – public benefit should be central – more emphasis on knowledge creation, participation and dissemination.
- There is a need for land use planning at the landscape scale
  - Land use planning maps and GIS should facilitate area classification
  - Plan-led system to inform the wider planning agenda rather than the piece-meal situation we have at the moment (environmental issues cross all sections)
- Key role of planning to coordinate all topics across the environment
  - Need for more robust consultation process – housing has been approved with insufficient supporting infrastructure. Planners depend on information from others – need for integrated approach (which may be achieved by RPA)
  - Proactive involvement for planning system – consider wider environmental gain from development to promote the best way forward
- Greater expertise is needed for contaminated sites
  - NIEA pressure to meet targets but don’t have resources.
- Support noted for Ministers positive focus on tourism

## Land Use

**Chair: Helen Noble**

**Government Representative: Graeme Seymour**

**Notetaker: Anthony McCluskey**

### **Access to land for recreation:**

- In NI, farmland is seen as being inaccessible and off-limits
- Access often depends on the personal preference of the farmer, but most are reluctant to allow access to members of the public because of concerns about liability, and the risk of litigation taken against them by people who get injured on their land.
- There is a need for greater clarity on this issue: the government needs to issue advice to farmers to allay their concerns which may be preventing access.
- There is also a need for proper designation of land for recreation: if landowners are unwilling to allow large scale free access, land away from agricultural areas could be designated for recreational use.
- The provision of access (e.g. through path creation) is the responsibility of local councils. This varies greatly between the different councils, with some being more interested in this than others. If greater access to the countryside is to be encouraged, councils need to become more involved in providing, maintaining and regulating access.
- The example of Fermanagh Council was given: this council prioritises environmental protection, because this area depends so heavily on environmental recreation and tourism
- Problems associated with new kinds of recreation activities (e.g. kite surfing) should be dealt with through proper designation of sites, to avoid causing damage to farms and areas around farms.
- But how will appropriate use of land be policed? By individuals, communities, councils?

### **Conservation**

- Landscape-scale conservation has the potential to deliver environmental benefits, while allowing farmers to make a living and food to be produced.
- In the future, there will be more emphasis on increasing food production, and climate change may alter the way farming is carried out. These could have detrimental effects on the environment.
- The approach taken in designating River Catchment Areas shows how whole landscapes can be coherently designated and the environment improved.
- But farmers will need incentives to encourage them to farm in a more environmentally friendly way.
- There may not be a need for more legislation; rather, appropriate application of existing legislation should be undertaken e.g. the E.C. landscape convention.
- Northern Ireland is small enough to be able to apply landscape-scale management effectively. Decisions on how land is used could be made on the basis of land capability assessments.

- More support needs to be given for existing groups that undertake landscape-scale conservation –for example, the Lough Neagh and Lower Bann Advisory Committee was one such group which had its funding completely withdrawn recently, forcing it to disband. This sends out contradictory messages.

### **Ecosystem services**

- Land can provide multiple ecosystem services, and support for these services is needed.
- Resources to allow landowners to maintain the land in such a way as to provide optimal ecosystem services could be useful
- We need to balance our use of ecosystem services, and use them in a way that does not harm others. There will be more pressure to increase food production, but we need to consider how increasing the intensity of agriculture can impact on other ecosystem services
- What choices need to be made between agricultural intensity and ecosystem services?
- How can we make more use of wind and tidal energy? How do these integrate renewable energy and conserve biodiversity?
- There is a need to find the optimal degree of management

### **Legislation**

- The general view was that there is already a lot of existing legislation, but that it is poorly applied. Often, application of legislation is left up to councils, but this results in uneven application of legislation. Councils that are not applying the legislation should be identified and advised on how to do so. In addition to this, local councillors then need to be educated on what the legislation means, and how it should be used in their area.
- Some important legal issues also need to be clarified – especially that of liability for people accessing farmers' land.
- A white paper on these issues may be needed.

### **Built Heritage**

- Private landowners whose land includes a feature of heritage importance (but not necessarily the building they live in or utilise) should be able to access state funding for their role in maintaining those features.
- They can be seen as local custodians of heritage which would otherwise have to be maintained by the state, if at all.
- Local communities can have a role in maintaining built heritage and archaeology – their actions should be directed and supported too

### **Miscellaneous**

- Many of the issues around land use involve several government departments, but who is pulling it all together to make a coherent policy?

- Councils need to co-operate and resolve conflict e.g. some councils see land as being primarily for development, but neighbouring councils may prioritise environmental protection more heavily
- The economy is seen as the main focus of the Programme for Government, and this cascades through all departments. The environment needs to be higher on the agenda, and not seen as such an easy target for cuts.
- NI is missing out on a lot of funding from the EU because it is not being applied for. The ROI has benefited greatly from this, particularly in the heritage sector. The money should be applied for, and used more efficiently.
- In government, a lot of work is duplicated by the different departments - there is a need for smart ways of doing things, co-ordinated at a higher level.
- Do we need a high level land use strategy? Departments are issuing white papers that are not joined up, but land use is a cross-assembly issue.