



# THE WAY AHEAD

Policies for Northern Ireland's Environment

January 2006





Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the forum and networking body for organisations interested in the environment of Northern Ireland. It assists members to develop views on issues affecting the environment and to influence policy and practice impacting on the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland.

NIEL is core funded by the Environment and Heritage Service and receives significant contributions from its membership through their subscriptions.

NIEL carries out activities within its five strategic aims:

- Strategic Leadership
- Networking
- Policy
- Information
- Membership Services

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# FOREWORD

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NIEL is the forum and networking body for non-governmental organisations concerned about the environment of Northern Ireland, comprising 37 full members who collectively represent over 80,000 individuals. This publication has arisen from widespread concern from both policy and community based organisations. The five major thematic areas should command the attention of both those who make and those who implement policy in Northern Ireland.

The most effective outcome would be a co-ordinated commitment and effort to see that these vital issues are effectively taken forward with the minimum of delay. The text is short, straightforward and clear and justifies immediate action. I commend it to you. Specifically, implementation of the following 10 recommendations would provide a significant step forward towards the improvement of the Northern Ireland environment.

*Pat Jess*

**PAT JESS, CHAIRMAN**  
NORTHERN IRELAND ENVIRONMENT LINK

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### STRUCTURES

- ◇ Northern Ireland should have a fully functioning, adequately resourced, independent environmental protection agency.
- ◇ The Northern Ireland sustainable development strategy requires a robust implementation plan that is fully adopted by all of government and used as a framework to promote co-operative working on environmental issues.

### REGULATION

- ◇ The 'Plan Led System' should be fully implemented, including all the relevant PPSs and Area Plans, a removal of the bias towards development and introduction of third party right of appeal.
- ◇ Environmental regulations and legislation should be fully implemented with effective enforcement and prosecutions and fees set to act as deterrents.

## RESOURCING

- ◇ Government should manage its entire estate sustainably (with regard to purchasing, building, energy, natural heritage, waste, etc.) to set an example, to ensure full government participation in sustainable development and environmental strategies and to act as a financial driver in the wider community.
- ◇ Resources should be allocated to projects and activities which fulfil major governmental strategies and promote sustainable development.

## MANAGEMENT

- ◇ Both designated areas (natural and built) and the wider countryside should be managed to promote biodiversity, halt the loss of species and habitats and conserve our cultural heritage whilst encouraging the sustainable economic use of the land and landscape.
- ◇ Management decisions on designated areas should take into account the possible impacts of climate change.

## PUBLIC AWARENESS

- ◇ The public should be facilitated to recognise that a healthy environment is a fundamental determinant of their quality of life.
- ◇ An approach should be adopted to 'consultation' and 'stakeholder' processes by all government departments that encourages and facilitates public participation and ownership.

# INTRODUCTION

## WHERE WE ARE

### *Northern Ireland and its place in the world*

Northern Ireland is very much a part of the world. Not only do activities taking place far from here have significant impacts on our lives, our economy and our environment, we have impacts on places very far away. Of course what we do each day also has impacts on the world that our children will inherit. Our 'environmental footprint' in Northern Ireland is approximately the same as that of the UK as a whole; if the entire global population lived in the same way as we do it would take over three planets to support it. Clearly this is not sustainable, and we can and must change our patterns of living. Although this will certainly entail making changes, it does not necessarily have to impose serious hardship. However, if we do not take steps in the right direction now, dealing with the even more serious problems in the future will involve much greater changes in our way of life.

We are not immune from any of the major environmental threats facing other parts of the world. For most we have a specific local manifestation as the chart below shows.

### *Climate Change*

Climate change is such a significant issue that it impacts on all other environmental issues and indeed on almost all aspects of our lives. It will impact on the distribution of plants and animals, meaning that the traditional view of 'nature reserves' may need to be radically revised; no matter how well protected a site is, changes in climatic conditions may make it unsuitable for the species for which it was designated. Changing conditions will mean that areas formerly unsuitable for some species will become favourable; this will include pest and disease species which could have major impacts on native wildlife and our health. Management of the countryside will need to take into account these and other factors, such as the need to increase our reliance on renewable energy resources, and this may lead to changes in the crops we grow and how we manage our wild areas. Increasingly, significant areas of land will need to be set aside for water management and flood control; such areas can also be of value for nature conservation, energy production and recreation.

Global Problem	Local Manifestation
Soil - erosion, pollution	Erosion, compaction, nutrient excess
Water - amount, pollution, marine	Diffuse pollution, sewage discharges
Air	Urban air quality, rural ammonia
Conserving biodiversity	Designation, management, loss of species
Alien invaders	Zebra mussels, nematodes
Fuel reserves	Lignite, nuclear, renewables
Waste	Landfill, waste export, recycling rates
People pressure and footprints	Using 3.5 times our 'fair share' of resources

## *The specific problems in Northern Ireland*

Planning ahead, taking into account likely future impacts, will mean adopting a new approach to planning in both urban and rural areas if we are to avoid huge costs arising from flooding, subsidence and erosion. To play our part in the international efforts to reduce climatic impacts of human activities we should encourage the reuse of older buildings: reusing an existing building uses less than half the energy of building new ones.

Prevention is always better than cure; there must be a new emphasis on using energy with maximum efficiency by requiring higher levels of insulation and promoting 'carbon neutral' buildings.

In general we must become much more flexible and responsive in our dealings with the natural world as increasingly unpredictable and severe weather conditions dominate.

Where are we in Northern Ireland at present? What issues still need to be addressed if we are to take our environmental protection duties seriously?

- \* Northern Ireland is good at making policy and, recently, at passing legislation, but it is not good at implementation.

- \* Northern Ireland is not visionary enough - it tends to 'catch up' with the situation elsewhere, rather than establish new standards.

- \* The environment has a low priority - for politicians and civil servants. The Department of the Environment is 'just one of' the departments, interest groups and funding priorities - and often not a very powerful one at that.

- \* There is a tendency to become overwhelmed by systems, bureaucracy and administration and lose sight of the bigger picture and the importance of action.

- \* Highly visible results are required, including specific targets and independent assessment of outcomes.

- \* Effective processes are required to bring people along, show them their role and encourage action, but emphasis on getting the process right must not over-ride the need for results.

- \* There is a lack of democratic accountability - it is difficult for people to tell government what their priorities are.

- \* There is limited communication and integration among the many different parts of government.

- \* Insufficient attention is paid to monitoring, management and enforcement.

These issues can be overcome, through adopting a long-term perspective, developing and using partnerships to address complex issues, identifying 'win-win' solutions to solve complex problems and by focusing on *solving* our problems, rather than just *avoiding* them (e.g. by trying to avoid prosecution for our failures). The threat of infraction proceedings can be most useful to stimulate action, but very bad if it actually happens, diverting much needed funds to legal battles and fines and away from effective environmental action.

# WHERE WE WANT TO GO

## *Local issues and what needs to be done*

How can we address these issues in Northern Ireland? It immediately becomes apparent that we must deal with political realities as well as environmental problems. Environmental issues cannot be addressed in the absence of the political and structural capacity and the will to deal with them. We must look to the future if we are to devise and implement effective solutions and take the long term decisions required; we must set and splint the broken leg, not apply a sticking plaster to the surface cut.

If we are to bring about effective environmental protection we need effective **Structures**, the environment must be recognised as a public and political **Priority** and society must allocate adequate **Resources** to address the problems. None of these is enough in isolation, and all need to be addressed simultaneously.

### *A three tiered approach*

A three tiered approach is required, with actions at all three levels proceeding simultaneously to reinforce each other.

- There must be **Education and Information** to encourage and facilitate attitudinal and behavioural change; education for all ages and levels, and information provided to the public that is targeted, easily understood and simple to act upon.
- There needs to be **Economic Incentives** which encourage effective environmental action; these can be in the form of positive incentives to do things, such as grants for insulation or renewable energy installation; or taxes, fees or increased prices which discourage other actions, such as using peat, disposing of materials inappropriately or using fuel inefficient vehicles.

- Finally, these two 'encouraging' areas must be underpinned by an effective and highly visible system of **Regulation** involving legislation, monitoring and enforcement to ensure that those who break the rules receive adequate disincentives to ensure that they do not do so again, and that others are discouraged strongly from behaving in an illegal manner. If the other systems are functioning effectively, and if there is a high profile of the regulatory system, it should seldom be necessary to prosecute.

### *NGOs and Government - partners for the environment*

Government and non-governmental organisations want the same things for the environment of Northern Ireland. However, while the ultimate goals are virtually identical, there are differences in approach. NGOs generally want to go further and faster than government is able to. This is positive, as it means that there is a strong voice and pressure to counterbalance those who are lobbying against environmental protection or action. This voice 'pulls' government action by raising public and political awareness of issues and it can also provide pressure to increase the allocation of resources.

The roles are complementary and mutually supportive. NGOs are generally very cost effective and can harness enthusiasm and expertise through volunteers that would not otherwise be available to government. NGOs can deliver services on behalf of government, from managing nature reserves to monitoring and surveying. NGOs are particularly effective at education and public awareness roles, as people may be cynical of governmental messages but more accepting of an independent voice.

# DEVELOPING 'THE WAY AHEAD'

Three years ago Northern Ireland Environment Link published a document called *Worth the Paper?* which proposed a number of specific recommendations that NIEL members felt would achieve significant practical results in improving Northern Ireland's environment. There were 25 recommendations devised with the specific aim of being relatively quickly progressed. The target of this document was the NI Assembly. Unfortunately, the Assembly went into suspension prior to the publication of the report, depriving it of its prime audience.

The current document revisits those 25 recommendations and assesses what progress has been made in the meantime. While there has been significant progress in taking forward 20 of the recommendations, there are five for which the situation has deteriorated. We have asked those who made the original recommendations, where possible, or others with relevant expertise to update the recommendations in light of recent developments. This has resulted in a revised list of 25 recommendations which NIEL members feel would make a significant contribution to the improvement of Northern Ireland's environment.

*The Way Ahead* identifies some underlying, fundamental issues which need to be addressed if we are to significantly improve environmental protection and the quality of the environment in Northern Ireland. It makes a number of recommendations within five major themes which we in the NGO sector feel would bring about significant improvements if adopted and implemented. It then connects these to the 25 recommendations derived from *Worth the Paper?*.

There are a selection of areas for action, not by any means a complete list. For example there are no specific recommendations regarding the archaeological heritage and the marine environment although these are important areas where immediate action is required.

Implementing these recommendations will not solve all of Northern Ireland's environmental problems. There are many other things, often of equal or greater importance, which also need to be done. Their implementation will, however, help bring about significant improvements and NIEL members look forward to assisting in their implementation.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Northern Ireland Environment Link members propose that the following major recommendations in five key areas will move us forward significantly in offering our environment the protection it requires. All are within current government policy, and several are actually specific goals of government.

These are areas in which government and NGOs can work together for the improvement of Northern

Ireland's environment. Three years ago the recommendations in *Worth the Paper?* were identified by NIEL members as being their 'top recommendations which they felt could be implemented in the next year'. These revised recommendations, and the more general ones which they support, are again a call to specific action as well as an assessment of progress. Let us hope that in three years' time we can record significant progress on all of these recommendations .

## STRUCTURES

### OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◇ Northern Ireland should have a fully functioning, adequately resourced, independent environmental protection agency.
- ◇ The Northern Ireland sustainable development strategy requires a robust implementation plan that is fully adopted by all of government and used as a framework to promote co-operative working on environmental issues.

### SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. An independent environmental protection agency should be established for Northern Ireland.
2. The government should initiate a fundamental review of the planning system looking at reforms including increasing public involvement and introducing third party appeals.
3. The Strategic Environmental Assessment process should be developed to use all knowledge and information in an integrated fashion, with mechanisms to ensure quality and monitor progress. It should be used neither as an excuse for inaction nor as a means to avoid appropriate development.
4. Planning service should fulfil the UK-wide condition of the Heritage Lottery Fund's Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) grant for Conservation Areas by applying measures to protect the architectural details that make the THI areas special. There should be at least one qualified buildings conservation officer located within each planning office.
5. Local authorities should adopt sustainable development as a strategic framework for all policies and developments.

## REGULATION

### OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS :

- ◇ The 'Plan Led System' should be fully implemented, including all the relevant PPSs and Area Plans, a removal of the bias towards development and introduction of third party right of appeal.
- ◇ Environmental regulations and legislation should be fully implemented with effective enforcement and prosecutions and fees set to act as deterrents.

### SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

6. The eco-homes environmental assessment process should be required by 2007 and energy efficiency standards set significantly above those currently required by building regulations for all new social housing built in Northern Ireland.
7. Government should conduct a broad and detailed review and debate which considers the environmental impact of housing, access to housing and equity in housing provision.
8. All government properties should obtain their power requirements from renewable sources and implement energy efficiency measures to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and to set a good example to the public.
9. Pollution from septic tanks, including their contribution to nutrient loading, should be discouraged through better education about their functioning, care and maintenance. Greater use should be made of fines and penalties commensurate with the damage caused to watercourses and septic tanks should be included in forthcoming water charges in a way that encourages their proper management.

## RESOURCING

### OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◇ Government should manage its entire estate sustainably (with regard to purchasing, building, energy, natural heritage, waste, etc.) to set an example, to ensure full government participation in sustainable development and environmental strategies and to act as a financial driver in the wider community.
- ◇ Resources should be allocated to projects and activities which fulfil major governmental strategies and promote sustainable development.

### SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

10. Local government should agree a set of priorities within which they direct money and projects towards sustainability - e.g. reducing reliance on fossil fuels, reducing pollution, increasing biodiversity, reducing waste and creating green jobs.
11. The opportunities for environmental education and education for sustainable development in the new curriculum should be fully realised with the development and delivery of support materials and teacher and youth leader training in their use.
12. In view of the pressing need to deal with nutrient loading of soil under cross-compliance measures, an appropriate technology transfer mechanism should be put in place to actively promote the introduction of tree-pasture systems.
13. Support should be provided for groups of farmers to collaborate, explore, develop and demonstrate new pilot initiatives building on creative uses of natural and cultural resources.
14. The NI Cycling Strategy should be implemented fully with resources made available for engineering and promotional work.

## MANAGEMENT

### OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◇ Both designated areas (natural and built) and the wider countryside should be managed to promote biodiversity, halt the loss of species and habitats and conserve our cultural heritage whilst encouraging the sustainable economic use of the land and landscape.
- ◇ Management decisions on designated areas should take into account the possible impacts of climate change.

### SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

**15.** The designation of national parks needs to be adequately resourced with more transparency about the process to ensure that people think positively about parks and that all rumours and fears are addressed.

**16.** A comprehensive, adequately funded programme of management and monitoring should be implemented to ensure all species and habitats listed in the Habitats Directive are maintained at or restored to favourable conservation status in their natural range.

**17.** A programme of monitoring indicator species should be introduced as a part of local sustainability assessments. In some areas a baseline survey and new ongoing monitoring arrangements will be needed, and a major effort by both government and NGOs is required to increase coverage of the breeding bird survey.

**18.** Forest Service should restore all its ancient woods currently planted with conifers and encourage such action by other land owners.

**19.** A greater urgency should be accorded to producing the Forestry Strategy and rolling out the delivery mechanisms, with a target to increase the forested area to 10% within 25 years and a minimum of 75% of trees planted to be native broadleaves.

**20.** Maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity should be a priority in the management of all public sector open space sites.

**21.** A more proactive approach to habitat creation using local provenance species must be taken rather than just focusing on measuring, monitoring and maintaining current habitats.

## **PUBLIC AWARENESS**

### **OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- ◇ **The public should be facilitated to recognise that a healthy environment is a fundamental determinant of their quality of life.**
- ◇ **An approach should be adopted to ‘consultation’ and ‘stakeholder’ processes by all government departments that encourages and facilitates public participation and ownership.**

### **SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 22.** Central government in its many departments and agencies should adopt at least the same level of environmental management and openness in reporting its progress as has been adopted by NI businesses and local authorities.
- 23.** Public interest in all environmental issues must be increased and the information people require for them to make informed decisions must be provided in an accessible format by government and NGOs.
- 24.** Education and Library Boards should ensure that all schools adopt a 'whole school' approach to sustainable development, demonstrating the practical application of sustainable development principles to their staff, students and community.
- 25.** Environment and Heritage Service should support the implementation of creative solutions to encourage changes in attitudes and behaviour regarding waste management.

# STRUCTURES

## OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◇ Northern Ireland should have a fully functioning, adequately resourced, independent environmental protection agency.
- ◇ The Northern Ireland sustainable development strategy requires a robust implementation plan that is fully adopted by all of government and used as a framework to promote co-operative working on environmental issues.

## RECOMMENDATION 1

**An independent environmental protection agency should be established for Northern Ireland.**

DIANE RUDDOCK

## THE NATIONAL TRUST

A coalition of nine conservation organisations has been actively campaigning for improved environmental protection for Northern Ireland. During 2003/2004 the coalition commissioned research, undertook a public consultation exercise and had the results of this independently analysed. The clear conclusion is that Northern Ireland should have an independent Environmental Protection



*(SOURCE: The National Trust)*

Agency, structured as a non-departmental public body. The five main political parties in NI included environmental protection in their manifestos for the May 2005 election.

Government has agreed to undertake a wide-ranging review of environmental governance to begin in early 2006.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

**The government should initiate a fundamental review of the planning system looking at reforms including increasing public involvement and introducing third party appeals.**

GARETH HARPER

### RURAL COMMUNITY NETWORK



*(SOURCE: Mourne Heritage Trust)*

Since publication of *Worth the Paper?* progress has been made on the planning front. This progress has largely been based on discussions on how best to move forward rather than any real improvements on the ground, but progress it is.

In June 2004 the Department for Regional Development convened an external working group on the 'Focused Assessment of the Regional Development Strategy'. The working group focused on identifying ways of reinvigorating some of the initial interest and excitement that was created around the launch of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS). Various members of the working group, including NIEL and the Rural Community Network (RCN), made presentations to the RDS team on their thoughts on possible ways forward. RCN focused on encouraging thinking on new ways of engaging and bringing communities to the centre of decision making and strategic planning processes. RCN reported on the plethora of documents that have set out strategies for 'Shaping Our Future', 'Imagining Our Future' and 'Sharing Our Future', to name but a few with the numbers '2010 or 2015' in the title, commenting that all had failed to

translate through to local realities. RCN introduced its work on the SPAN project (Strategic Planning Action Network) which is looking at new participatory approaches to strategic planning and multi-level governance.

RCN suggested that the SPAN project represents a real opportunity to take a step back and to re-think how we develop strategies for future development. The external working group on the RDS has since been dissolved, with a commitment from DRD for ongoing engagement with members during the consultation phase of the Focussed Assessment. It remains to be seen how the input of RCN and others on the External Working Group is listened to and whether it makes a difference in the future.

Given the recently announced changes in planning due to the review of public administration, getting the public participation aspects of planning right is particularly important. It also provides a strong argument for the need for third party appeals to ensure that the planning system is fully responsive to local people.

## RECOMMENDATION 3

**The Strategic Environmental Assessment process should be developed to use all knowledge and information in an integrated fashion, with mechanisms to ensure quality and monitor progress. It should be used neither as an excuse for inaction nor as a means to avoid appropriate development.**

ISABEL HOOD



## MOURNE HERITAGE TRUST



An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a method of ensuring that the likely effects of a new development on the environment are fully understood and taken in to account before planning permission is given for development to continue.

The EIA system at the level of individual planning applications has not changed during the term of this review. However, some tentative progress has been initiated regarding Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). A conference in March 2005 was an eye-opener to many who should have known more and a depressing indication of the low level of competence available as well as the lack of readiness to implement it.

SEA is one of the 'apple pie and motherhood' categories of legislation as far as the environmental sector is concerned. However, depressingly, understanding and implementation seem to lag far behind the regulation. The focus is on public sector

plans - which may themselves give rise to EIAs when implemented. Examples are Land Use Plans, Area Plans, Regional Economic Development Strategies and implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

A welcome aspect is that, where SEA is not deemed necessary, the decisions and reasons must be made public. Consultation is written into the process and assessments should nest at various levels to avoid unnecessary duplication and to ensure complementarity. The SEA system has many loopholes - not least the lack of understanding, expertise, information, definitions and resources needed.

There has been no change in the areas of Statutory Consultees or of Third Party Appeals (though, depressingly, changes to planning legislation in Scotland seem to have rejected Third Party Appeals).

## RECOMMENDATION 4

**Planning service should fulfil the UK-wide condition of the Heritage Lottery Fund's Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) grant for Conservation Areas by applying measures to protect the architectural details that make the THI areas special. There should be at least one qualified buildings conservation officer located within each planning office.**

RITA HARKIN

### ULSTER ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE SOCIETY



*(SOURCE: Architectural Heritage Fund)*

Although Conservation Area designation protects buildings from demolition, it does not defend the historic details that give texture and interest to the streetscape. Recent injections of capital from the Heritage Lottery Fund have contributed to a major boost in conserving these areas, although concern remains as to whether or not this investment is being protected.

This issue remains critical to the character of Conservation Areas, especially those in receipt of public funding. Article 4 Directions would mean that details like windows and doors could be safeguarded following sensitive restoration; otherwise they can be removed without requiring planning permission.

Perhaps the critical issue is, however, the lack of qualified staff devoted to the management and promotion of Conservation Areas. Without a full complement of designated conservation officers it is no surprise that these tools are not employed.

At present there are two dedicated conservation officers in Northern Ireland, charged with looking after 59 Conservation Areas. Numerous areas of townscape or village character are also being introduced through the development plan process, but there is virtually no-one in Planning Service in a position to manage them.

This lack of in-house expertise will inevitably lead to the erosion of the special character of these areas and undermine the designations.

## ***RECOMMENDATION 5***

**Local authorities should adopt sustainable development as a strategic framework for all policies and developments.**

MICHAEL DONNELLY

### **SUSTAINABLE NI**



*(SOURCE: RSPB)*

Each local area needs to have its own response to environmental, social and economic issues and local authorities are best placed to facilitate and deliver this.

Under Local Strategy Partnerships much more responsibility was given for creating locally based plans that identify local issues and set out how they can be tackled. Various councils have tried different approaches to reflect sustainable development within local government.

Many local authorities have adopted sustainable development as a strategic theme in their corporate plans but there is still little by way of reporting on progress. Therefore it is impossible to say

accurately how well councils are delivering on sustainable development goals.

Much of the confusion comes from the absence of an agreed set of actions or measures that every council can use and the result is that councils are carrying out different activities. Some have achieved a great deal and others have had a negligible impact. Most, if not all, local authorities have made progress in specific areas such as energy efficiency, the social economy or waste management.

One major sign of the lack of visibility of sustainable development is the inability to point to one big project or initiative that clearly demonstrates the principles of sustainable development.

# REGULATION

## OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◇ The 'Plan Led System' should be fully implemented, including all the relevant PPSs and Area Plans, a removal of the bias towards development and introduction of third party right of appeal.
- ◇ Environmental regulations and legislation should be fully implemented with effective enforcement and prosecutions and fees set to act as deterrents.

## RECOMMENDATION 6

**The eco-homes environmental assessment process should be required by 2007 and energy efficiency standards set significantly above those currently required by building regulations for all new social housing built in Northern Ireland.**

JIM KITCHEN

## WWF NORTHERN IRELAND

Every settlement has an impact on the Earth. We all rely on its products and services to supply us with raw materials and to absorb our waste. We cannot continue to plunder the planet for ever-increasing amounts of natural resources, generating an inexorable rise in the size of our ecological footprint.

Our homes are one of the main ways in which we consume timber, energy and water. Housing is responsible for nearly 30% of our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, one of the principal causes of climate change. Some progress has been made to make homes more energy-efficient by enhanced building regulation standards. However, the need remains to build more sustainable homes which will have the least possible environmental impact. For example, a house built to the EcoHomes 'excellent' standard will achieve a 35% reduction in its ecological footprint compared to a typical Northern Ireland house.

Since the publication of *Worth the Paper?* in April 2003 there has been a significant increase in interest in the concept of ecological foot-printing and in the contribution made by our homes to the size of

Northern Ireland's footprint. WWF's global snapshot of our use of the world's resources, the *Living Planet Report 2004*, illustrated the relentless rise in footprint and the consequent decline in species populations, by about 40% since 1970. These trends have recently been echoed by the UN's Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. The first detailed study of resource flows in Northern Ireland, *Northern Limits*, published in March 2004, demonstrated that the average footprint of someone living here is 5.63 hectares, the largest of any UK region. This is due, primarily, to two components - domestic energy and waste production.

The Westminster Select Committee on NI Affairs produced its report on social housing in NI. Among its recommendations it acknowledged the need to address the impacts of construction by urging the Minister to extend the GB Code for Sustainable Building to NI at the earliest opportunity; no action has yet resulted. The emerging NI Sustainable Development Strategy will need to consider housing as an important element within its remit and should adopt this recommendation within its action plan.

## ***RECOMMENDATION 7***

**Government should conduct a broad and detailed review and debate which considers the environmental impact of housing, access to housing and equity in housing provision.**

MURRAY WATT

### **NORTHERN IRELAND TENANTS ACTION PROJECT**



All new housing is subject to building regulations and planning control and hence there is huge potential for government to intervene in setting an agenda for developing more sustainable housing strategies applicable to all forms of provision across the province. Northern Ireland continues to lag behind the rest of the United Kingdom in not just a legislative sense, but also in the determination and application of Decent Homes and Lifetime Homes standards. At the same time patterns of new housing development, the decline of the social rented sector and inner city redevelopment have had negative impacts on efforts to maintain sustainable communities and it seems government has failed to capitalise on opportunities to consider housing issues in the whole.

It is noted that the Social Development Committee of the Assembly initiated an enquiry and that the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee considered a number of key housing issues in Northern Ireland.

It is regrettable that government has failed to respond positively to these inquiries and, whilst some long overdue legislative instruments have been introduced, nearly 50,000 households remain in urgent housing need and there is no clear strategic overview for the development of long-term sustainable housing policies. It is clear that despite some initial encouragement in the aftermath of devolution, commitment to consideration of developing an over-arching sustainable housing policy appears to have stalled and policy continues to be developed on an ad hoc basis.

As a way forward NIEL would encourage government to raise the profile of housing issues to the centre of considerations on public administration, planning and sustainable development; at the same time government should encourage greater public participation in such debates and in the development and implementation of housing and planning policies.

## RECOMMENDATION 8

All government properties should obtain their power requirements from renewable sources and implement energy efficiency measures to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and to set a good example to the public.

JONATHAN BUICK

## ACTION RENEWABLES



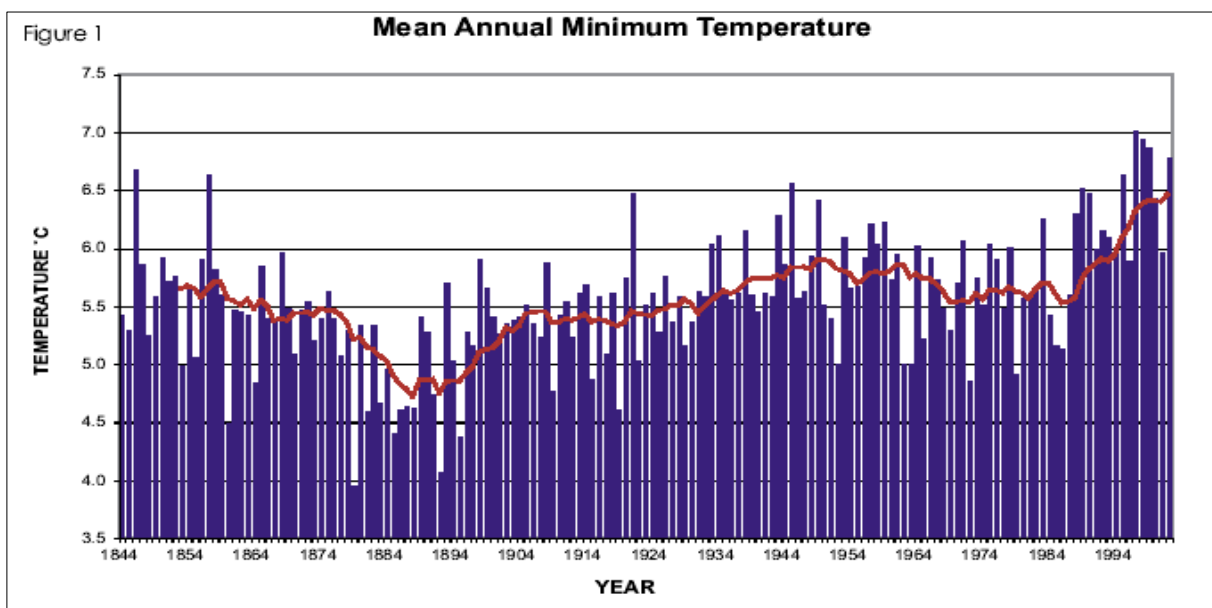
(SOURCE: B9 Energy)

Climate change is without doubt one of the most concerning global issues whose impacts have been gaining considerable recognition over the years. Governments have stepped in to try and ameliorate this situation with the main concern being to promote action to reduce energy consumption and increase the amount of our energy that comes from renewable resources.

Climate change is a worldwide issue whose local impacts are finally beginning to be

recognised. Increased flooding, the wettest November on record in 2004, shifts in migration, breeding or flowering times for some plants and animals; all show that climate change is affecting us here in Northern Ireland. The government has produced a major document on the anticipated impacts that climate change will have locally, and made suggestions as to how these could be ameliorated.

*Gradual rise in temperature in NI in last 120 years (SOURCE: DARD & QUB)*





*(SOURCE: Ursula Toman)*

International commitments, UK legislation and local concern promote action to reduce our energy consumption and increase the proportion of our energy that comes from renewable resources. Increasing the efficiency with which we use energy through insulation and other measures can have a significant impact on the comfort of those living on limited incomes and on the profitability of business.

All these factors work together to encourage us all to use energy more wisely. The last few years have seen a growing pressure to change the way we generate our electricity. As of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005, in Northern Ireland we have new legislation, a Renewables Obligation on electricity supply companies, which requires them to provide 6.3% of electricity from renewable sources. The abundance of renewable resources has encouraged the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) to declare an aspirational target to provide 12% of our electricity by 2012.

Action Renewables is a joint initiative in Northern Ireland between DETI and the Viridian Group. It was created in response to European, national and Northern Ireland Government commitments to renewable power. Action Renewables' objective is to increase understanding of the issues associated with conventional energy use such as the impending threat from climate change, depletion of resources and security of energy supplies and to promote renewables generally in the context of a possible solution. Energy use in buildings, providing services

such as water and space heating and lighting, equates to around 50% of the UK's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This can be reduced through installing renewable energy sources as a means of providing heat or power e.g. photovoltaic panels, heat pumps and wind turbines.

The Department of Trade and Investments' Energy White Paper (2003) brought forward the target that all public sector buildings in Northern Ireland should obtain 10% of their electricity from renewable energy sources by 2008. This target covers buildings such as schools, council buildings, government offices and hospitals. As such it represents an important step and it is estimated that public sector buildings currently obtain around 8% of their electricity from renewable sources. The 10% target is within reach.

However, public sector buildings need to do more in encouraging the installation of renewable energy technologies to supply their own needs. Excellent examples of this already exist in Northern Ireland, such as the wind turbine at Antrim Area Hospital and the NIE Smart Solar21 scheme helping each of the 26 local councils in Northern Ireland install 5kW of photovoltaic panels.

Many schools too have realised not just the energy and CO<sub>2</sub> savings resulting from installing renewable technologies such as solar water heating, wind power or heat pumps but also the added value impact of these technologies as teaching aids.

## RECOMMENDATION 9

**Pollution from septic tanks, including their contribution to nutrient loading, should be discouraged through better education about their functioning, care and maintenance. Greater use should be made of fines and penalties commensurate with the damage caused to watercourses and septic tanks should be included in forthcoming water charges in a way that encourages their proper management.**

ALEX MCGAREL

### WWF NORTHERN IRELAND



Northern Ireland has many regulations associated with water quality but to date they have had little effect on improving our waters and eutrophication continues to be a major problem. Waste water treatment works and agriculture are the main polluters but the contribution from septic tanks is also significant. Septic tanks are not regularly monitored by Environment and Heritage Service and often discharge foul effluent directly into our waterways and add to the excess nutrient burden that causes eutrophication. For this reason it is recommended that there should be greater use of fines and penalties for damage caused.

For several years there was a severe lack of monitoring of septic tank discharges and often such tanks were discharging foul effluent directly into our waterways. Septic tanks look set to continue slipping through government's controls on pollution in Northern Ireland. Government efforts and funding seem to be focused on bringing sewage works up to new standards required by Europe through the Urban Waste-Water Treatment (UWWT) Directive, and to reducing diffuse pollution from agriculture through better implementation of the Nitrates Directive.

Although raw sewage leaking from septic tanks is obviously of prime concern, their contribution to the phosphate loading of Northern Ireland's inland waters is also of considerable significance as it has an impact even from correctly functioning tanks. Phosphate is the main nutrient responsible for eutrophication in Northern Ireland's lakes and rivers and its removal from sewage treatment works' effluent in vulnerable areas like the Lough Neagh catchment is now a requirement under the UWWT.

Septic tanks however can continue to discharge nutrient-enriched effluent even within these zones and their contribution will have increased over the last two years since the addition of orthophosphate to Northern Ireland's drinking water. It is therefore of considerable concern that under the current proposals for Water Reform introducing a system of charging consumers for water in Northern Ireland that septic tanks will be exempt from standing charges but will incur emptying costs. This is likely to have the disastrous combined effect of encouraging their use but discouraging their proper maintenance.

# RESOURCING

## OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◇ Government should manage its entire estate sustainably (with regard to purchasing, building, energy, natural heritage, waste, etc.) to set an example, to ensure full government participation in sustainable development and environmental strategies and to act as a financial driver in the wider community.
- ◇ Resources should be allocated to projects and activities which fulfil major governmental strategies and promote sustainable development.

## RECOMMENDATION 10

**Local government should agree a set of priorities within which they direct money and projects towards sustainability - e.g. reducing reliance on fossil fuels, reducing pollution, increasing biodiversity, reducing waste and creating green jobs.**

MICHAEL DONNELLY

## SUSTAINABLE NI

In the long term local government will be an integral part of local planning processes as strategic overseer of activity and integrated processes within their area, as a funder and actively engaged in targeting programmes of action and sustainability.

In 2003 all Local Strategy Partnerships (LSPs) received training on how to integrate sustainable development into their work programmes. Many LSPs went on to devise plans that reflected sustainable development goals for the local area. However, there has been no formal measurement of their impact.



(SOURCE: Ursula Toman)

One of the issues has been the emphasis on financial accountability which has meant that much of the LSP focus is dedicated to ensuring money is spent properly and on time, which leaves less time to review and develop a proper response to sustainable development. This pressure also exists for other good causes such as poverty alleviation and health impact.

Additionally, LSPs have supported much good work on sustainable development and partnership working which by its nature contributes significantly to achieving sustainable development goals.

## RECOMMENDATION 11

The opportunities for environmental education and education for sustainable development in the new curriculum should be fully realised with the development and delivery of support materials and teacher and youth leader training in their use.

SUE CHRISTIE

### NORTHERN IRELAND ENVIRONMENT LINK



The new curriculum which will be coming into effect from 2006 offers many opportunities for enhanced delivery of environmental education and education for sustainable development (ESD). However, these opportunities must be fully realised by provision of relevant and integrated lesson plans which use environmental and sustainable development examples to deliver several aspects of the core curriculum.

The statutory revised curriculum provides a useful framework, but it will only fulfil its promise if government and NGOs work together to develop materials and teacher training to ensure that these aspects are actually taught in the classroom. It is also imperative that the examination system accord high priority to the issues, as if it is not examined, it will not be taught.

There are encouraging signs in the teacher training institutions and their commitment to Local and Global Environment Days being held for trainee teachers by the Environmental Education Forum.

However, there is now only one remaining specialist Field Study Centre operated by an Education and Library Board. Educational visits continue to be restrictive due to high administrative and transport costs. Teacher training is becoming increasingly difficult and expensive in regard to 'cover' while out of the classroom. More work needs to be done within the system to facilitate environmental education and education for sustainable development, not just in providing materials. The Outdoor Learning Manifesto as proposed for the rest of the UK should also apply in Northern Ireland.

## RECOMMENDATION 12

**In view of the pressing need to deal with nutrient loading of soil under cross-compliance measures, an appropriate technology transfer mechanism should be put in place to actively promote the introduction of tree-pasture systems.**

JIM McADAM

**DEPARTMENT OF  
AGRICULTURE & RURAL  
DEVELOPMENT /  
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST**



(SOURCE: UWT)

Everyone is aware of the value and importance of trees and woodland for wildlife and soil conservation, yet here in Northern Ireland we have the lowest level of tree cover in the whole of Europe.

For this reason, a more sustainable and diversified use of land is required. The need for an increased level of tree planting within our landscape is therefore essential, so have any new methods been introduced?

Since the publication of the recommendation there has been some progress by government in developing a Draft Forestry Strategy for Northern Ireland. This document concentrates largely on more conventional aspects of woodland and forestry development but does leave open the opportunity for more novel means of introducing trees into farmed landscapes. At a European level submissions have been made regarding the classification of land eligible for support under the Single Farm Payment.

Under this, the proposal is to allow agro-forestry systems, where trees are present in farmland at a density of less than 50 stems per hectare, to be classified as agricultural land and eligible for payment. Representation has been made to amend this to allow for a higher initial planting density with eventual thinning to 50 stems/ha of mature trees.

At a local level there has been little promotion or uptake of silvo-pastoral systems on farms. This is largely due to a lack of knowledge and awareness by farmers as the system does align well with future cross-compliance and land use objectives. The main problem has been the lack of a suitable technology transfer mechanism and commitment within the appropriate agencies. Although the policy, economic and environmental climate is becoming favourable, more progress on silvo-pastoral systems still needs to take place.

## RECOMMENDATION 13

**Support should be provided for groups of farmers to collaborate, explore, develop and demonstrate new pilot initiatives building on creative uses of natural and cultural resources.**

NICK MACK

### RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL



(SOURCE: RDC)

Over the years there have been numerous changes in the field of agriculture with economic, political and social trends which threaten to remove all but the largest farmers from their place in the agri-food industry. For this reason, it has been acknowledged that new measures need to be implemented in an attempt to support groups and farmers, such as new strategies for farm diversification.


The challenges facing farming continue to mount with the long anticipated but little prepared for arrival of the Water Framework Directive and, in particular, the Nitrates Directive. An early result is that a significant number of dairy farmers are selling their herds.

Farming is only beginning to get to grips with the new single farm payment and decoupling, which in theory could release them to look at different business ideas using their land.

In 2003 the government produced a vision document for agriculture and food, recently enhanced by the arrival of the Food Strategy document 'Fit for Market'. We noted there had yet to be an equally

clear vision for the significant body of smaller farms and farm families who must find new roles. This recent document at least paves the way for some new avenues for development such as local food marketing and linkages to the new rural development regulation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The latest reform of the CAP sees more emphasis placed on agri-environment schemes (particularly in the view of the UK government) but money for rural diversification may prove to be limited.

A new strategy for rural development is due to appear in early 2006 and it will be crucial for it to make the links between farming and non-farming to enable innovative use of rural resources. The Rural Development Council (RDC) has pressed government to see 'rural' as an asset to the region rather than a liability (something rural development, and rural proofing, focussing on disadvantage and inequality, has tended to make it). An asset-based approach provides a context for integrating rural resources into regional economic and social objectives and, with it, new ways for farmers to co-operate with other players and each other.



The basis for this requires better understanding and exploiting 'Multifunctionality' in agriculture; that is the different roles and services farms can provide, such as enhancing biodiversity, landscape and the ingredients of a rural sense of place, links to the countryside for rural communities and tourism, links to small enterprises based on niche foods grown ethically and organically or which are culturally genuine and distinctive, or in addressing energy and waste disposal needs.

Distinctive foods grown in particular landscapes with local pride and husbandry traditions contribute to the identity and competitiveness of districts across Northern Ireland as an alternative strategy to globalisation, part of the 'Cultural Economy'. It remains the case that these assets need to be more fully developed in an integrated farm and rural development strategy. It also remains the case that positions remain entrenched in defending a place in 'mainstream' (intensive, industrial) agriculture. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's (DARD) element of the PEACE II programme has shown that farmers can be encouraged and assisted to work in groups.

A recent study by RDC ('The Beacons Programme') included the Ballylaw farmers group near Strabane as a case study. The members highlighted the social capital benefits they had experienced as a result of being in the group;

*"There's a wild need for socialising amongst farmers - I was a recluse before the Ballylaw group."*

*"I get out very little - unless it's to the farm group - I went to the farmers forum and had a panic attack - it was so claustrophobic - I'm not used to so many people."*

*"Before the group I just waved at other farmers - the group is allowing some bonding now, I would stop and have a yarn when I go and do business - also now we help each other filling in forms and dealing with bank business - this wouldn't have happened before."*

This social capital, a resource for change, is perhaps an unanticipated and undervalued aspect of the approach by DARD, which in the first instance saw groups primarily as a stepping stone to grant applications. Support for such groups in the longer term is not on the horizon, yet this offers an ideal way to nurture farmers into new development pathways.

The building blocks for new forms of co-operation and action are there, what remains is the need for a strategy with vision for rural areas and people which can harness them and their skills.

## RECOMMENDATION 14

**The NI Cycling Strategy should be implemented fully with resources made available for engineering and promotional work.**

STEVEN PATTERSON

SUSTRANS




The NI Cycling Strategy was developed in 2000 and covers themes where cycling needs to be promoted; i.e. health, tourism, school travel and infrastructure details for local town cycle networks. Clearly, an increase in the number of people choosing to cycle to their workplace is a favoured option for helping to protect our environment and reduce levels of pollution from car emissions. However, in many areas, resources for engineering techniques need to be employed and campaigns developed to promote the importance and significance of cycling. Plenty of work has taken place on the delivery of the NI Cycling Strategy. The NI Cycle Forum with its three subgroups (Monitoring, Technical, Marketing) meet on a regular basis to coordinate the Strategy. This group provides a platform to share information between Government Departments and Cycling NGOs and voluntary groups. Roads Service provides the Secretariat to the main forum.

Cycle routes continue to be constructed. Most of these are of high quality with good surfaces in appropriate locations, but some are less so. Evidence shows a huge latent demand for cycling, particularly amongst school children (around 3% cycle to school - 33% would prefer to cycle). It is

thought lack of safe cycle routes is the main factor. Piece-meal marketing has taken place with the production of maps and leaflets by various government organisations and Sustrans. Signs are looking better now that since a new organisation, Cycle NI with two full-time staff members, was formed in April 2005.

The NI Cycle Forum is monitoring usage through 33 counters. Data from these cannot be confirmed as yet due to several technical and statistical difficulties. It is expected to have figures available by early 2006 showing trends. Indications are that cycling levels have met their targets (of doubling) on, or in the vicinity, of some high quality routes. There has been little increased usage where the infrastructure has not improved. The Regional Transportation Strategy proposes spend of £11.9m over 10 years. Regrettably the spend for the first three years is reported at £2.4m rather than the anticipated £3.6m. Walking measures are also under-spending at the same rate. Other sources of funds through EU grant have been quite positive through tourism and rural development initiatives. Concern is that funding will decrease from EU sources in years to come.



The National Cycle Network co-ordinated by Sustrans, has seen 700 miles of cycle routes built in Northern Ireland between 1996 and 2005. This obviously complements and helps deliver aspects of the NI Cycling Strategy. The routes include a range of facilities and use off road paths and cycle tracks in the urban areas while much of the rural network is on signed minor roads and lanes. A Millennium Commission lottery grant of £3.5m was awarded to Sustrans in 1995 and this was the catalyst to enable 132 individual projects to be completed at a cost of £10m. These individual projects included the £1m

Millennium Foot and Cycle bridge in Coleraine, the upgrading of 20 miles of the Newry to Portadown towpath and three "toucan" road crossings along the riverside route in Belfast. A series of award winning maps and free leaflets was also produced to raise awareness of the network and many high profile openings of routes resulted. The Network was voted the most popular project funded by the National Lottery and the Lagan and Lough route through Belfast won the best route in an urban area and the Foyle Valley Greenway won the best Greenway in Europe in 2003.

# MANAGEMENT

## OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◇ Both designated areas (natural and built) and the wider countryside should be managed to promote biodiversity, halt the loss of species and habitats and conserve our cultural heritage whilst encouraging the sustainable economic use of the land and landscape.
- ◇ Management decisions on designated areas should take into account the possible impacts of climate change.

## RECOMMENDATION 15

**The designation of national parks needs to be adequately resourced with more transparency about the process to ensure that people think positively about parks and all rumours and fears are addressed.**

ISABEL HOOD

## MOURNE HERITAGE TRUST

The Mourne Heritage Trust, established in 1997 to manage the Mourne and Slieve Croob AONB, is one of many organisations assigned to oversee and aid in the safeguarding of our protected landscapes. Areas are designated and protected to safeguard their varied and spatial character for both the present and future generations.

Progress since the publication of the consultation document on the Primary Legislation for the establishment of National Parks in Northern Ireland in 2004 has not been rapid. The public response to the consultation was disappointingly sparse. No report or further consultation has been issued. There has been a Ministerial statement that a park will be designated, but as yet with no timescale.



*(SOURCE: Mourne Heritage Trust)*

The establishment of the Working Party to consider the designation of the Mourne area as Northern Ireland's first National Park took place in October 2004. A work plan has been identified and some work is in progress. A consultant has been appointed to look at boundary issues. However, the lack of a dedicated budget and a low level of Environment and Heritage Service resourcing for the Working Party have not helped to move things along. The Working Party's slow progress has allowed fears, rumours and resistance to flourish in the absence of public consultation or information. There has been no apparent progress on the re-designation of AONBs under the Amenity Lands Order. In terms of legislation, this has been only adequately addressed with much momentum lost along the way.

## RECOMMENDATION 16

**A comprehensive, adequately funded programme of management and monitoring should be implemented to ensure all species and habitats listed in the Habitats Directive are maintained at or restored to favourable conservation status in their natural range.**

MALACHY CAMPBELL

**WWF NORTHERN IRELAND**



*(SOURCE: EHS)*

All species and habitats listed within the Habitats and Species Directives require full management, monitoring and protection. Designation by itself is not enough.

The original recommendation focussed on the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the European Habitats Directive and recommended the implementation of a comprehensive programme of management and monitoring. Such management and monitoring is in fact a legal requirement of the Habitats Directive. While the designation of more SACs for Atlantic salmon is anticipated, Strangford Lough is a sad illustration of how mismanagement can fail our SAC network. While government departments argued

over who was responsible for what, large parts of Strangford's horse mussel beds have been destroyed. This destruction, which was preventable, is the subject of a complaint to the European Commission, which, in response, has initiated legal action against the UK government. Any penalties for this breach of European law will be passed on to Northern Ireland, which means our administration could face fines running into millions of pounds. Like many others who care about our planet, I ask myself why clear warnings of the dangers were, for decades, ignored?

Why is it only when something goes badly wrong that we start to act? Was the original management plan for Strangford Lough worth the paper it was written on?

## **RECOMMENDATION 17**

**A programme of monitoring indicator species should be introduced as a part of local sustainability assessments. In some areas a baseline survey and new ongoing monitoring arrangements will be needed, and a major effort by both government and NGOs is required to increase coverage of the breeding bird survey.**

CLIVE MELLON

**NORTHERN  
IRELAND  
BIRDWATCHERS  
ASSOCIATION**



Despite the recent improvements in availability of data, Northern Ireland is still deficient in data on many key bird species, especially when compared to the rest of the UK. For example, despite the recent expansion of the volunteer-based Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), many more volunteers are needed to increase coverage to enable data on scarcer species (such as tree sparrow and yellowhammer) to be obtained. While results emerging for some of our most widespread species may be encouraging, these still need to be treated with caution due to the poor coverage in Northern Ireland.

Wild bird populations can be very useful indicators of environmental quality and sustainability. However, this depends on the quality of data available. While every effort should be made to use an appropriate bird or animal indicator, this may not be possible in all areas due to lack of data. In such cases, establishing a suitable monitoring programme would be very valuable.

Big Garden Birdwatch is an excellent way of introducing the public to nature, and may provide some early indications of trends in common species. However, it will still need to be backed up by other monitoring programmes such as the Breeding Bird Survey.

## ***RECOMMENDATION 18***

**Forest Service should restore all its ancient woods currently planted with conifers and encourage such action by other land owners.**

PATRICK CREGG

**WOODLAND TRUST**



*(SOURCE: Woodland Trust)*

Our woodland areas are increasingly under pressure from golf courses, transport links, housing developments and other factors. One of the greatest threats to our ancient woodlands has been the planting of conifers on these most important finite resources. Clearly, without carefully planned restorative work, many species could be lost from our woods and it is for this reason that the Woodland Trust seeks the restoration of all planted ancient woodland sites.

Stronger, robust legislation is imperative if this most precious of resources is to be conserved for the benefit of wildlife and future generations.

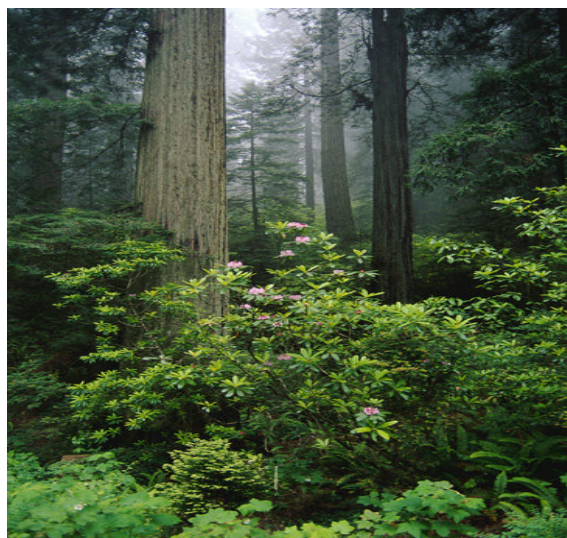
The Woodland Trust still emphasises the need for a strategic expansion of woodland to increase the opportunities to protect and enhance existing ancient woodland and in so doing obtain the greatest conservation gain. Little progress has been made pending the release of the Forestry Strategy outlying the vision for forestry in Northern Ireland.

## RECOMMENDATION 19

**A greater urgency should be accorded to producing the Forestry Strategy and rolling out the delivery mechanisms, with a target to increase the forested area to 10% within 25 years and a minimum of 75% of trees planted to be native broadleaves.**

BEN SIMON

### FOREST OF BELFAST



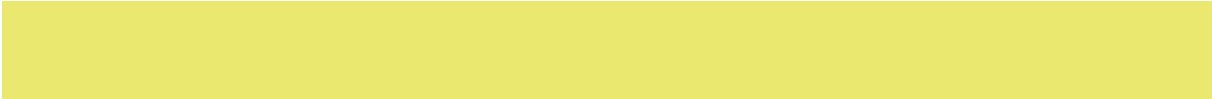
Northern Ireland has long been known for having the lowest level of tree cover in Europe with a figure of just over 6% of the land area. Figures of tree cover have fallen dramatically over the years and targets to increase these are not being met. In England, much activity has been undertaken in recent years to overcome this problem in an attempt to benefit both public amenity and biodiversity, as well as providing alternative uses for farmland and creating tourism, recreation and employment opportunities.

The Forest Service Business Plan 2004-2005 had as a key target increasing the combined public and private forest area by 1,500ha by 2007 at a rate of 500ha per year. This will have a negligible effect on the percentage of tree cover in Northern Ireland.

The Forest Service review document, *Options for Forestry* (2004), noted that there was a strong public interest in substantially increasing the amount of woodland in Northern Ireland and that '... each year we consume forest products equivalent to the production from an area one third the size of

Northern Ireland.' However, it proposes that the purchase of privately owned land will only be pursued where there is a clear public interest in doing so and also notes that proposals within the draft Rural Development Regulations from the EU, which are due to come into operation in 2007, may reduce the level of direct grant aid to encourage private planting.

Voluntary sector organisations like Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland, the Woodland Trust, The National Trust, Colin Glen Trust and Forest of Belfast continue to be the main organisations promoting a tree culture in Northern Ireland. Some of these organisations are planting large numbers of trees, for example Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland (CVNI) launched their Northern Ireland Tree Campaign in 2004 with the aim of planting 200,000 trees per year for five years, involving 10,000 people per year. The Woodland Trust has planted over 350,000 trees with local people and community groups since 1996 and has created 292ha of new woodland in Northern Ireland to date.



Caring for our existing trees is also essential in any tree strategy for Northern Ireland. The importance of ancient woodland is being actively addressed by the Woodland Trust, which is undertaking an Ancient Woodland Inventory for Northern Ireland. This aims to produce a record of ancient and long established woods in Northern Ireland and a GIS-based record and database of sites will be available by the end of the project in 2006. The Forest of Belfast is also undertaking a detailed study of Belvoir Park, an old estate, now in part a coniferous forest managed by Forest Service, which we now know contains some of the oldest oak trees in Ireland. A detailed study of the veteran trees at Crom is underway by The National Trust.

In recent years the Northern Ireland Native Woodland Group has had a positive role in bringing together statutory and voluntary organisations and those involved in the timber industry to start to deliver the Woodland Action Plan. The use of local provenance trees for the landscaping of the Toome by-pass was also a positive development. However, to date the planting of trees of local provenance has also been promoted largely through the work of the voluntary sector, for example 200,000 trees are grown by CVNI per year, most from native provenance. Also, the lack of financial or other support from government to encourage the production of trees from local sources continues to make this a precarious business, and unfortunately the Ulster Wildlife Trust has recently had to close its native tree nursery.

Protection for existing trees is also essential. However, Northern Ireland bizarrely continues to be not only the region of the EU with the lowest tree cover, but also still the only area of Britain or

Ireland that does not have felling licences. This is now being looked at by Forest Service as part of their review. In addition, our record of protecting individual trees through Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) is deplorable. Although recent amendments to planning legislation do give greater powers to planners to protect trees and automatically protects trees in building conservation areas, to date no significant improvement in tree protection has been noted on the ground and (unlike in Britain) Planning Service does not employ Tree Officers.

In summary, there is now good research into ancient trees, developing links between government departments concerned with trees, environmental NGOs and timber producers and users, and increasing awareness of the importance of planting local provenance material. However, there is no strategy in place to significantly increase tree cover in Northern Ireland and the record of tree protection is very depressing.

I would recommend Forest Service to take more of a lead role in promoting trees and forestry in Northern Ireland, for tree protection (TPOs and felling licences) to be treated as a much more serious issue, for targets that would lead to a significant increase in tree cover to be developed and implemented, and for the recommendations covering forestry in the Biodiversity Strategy to be fully implemented within an agreed timescale.

Our woods should also be managed more creatively to ensure that their value for biodiversity and recreation is maximised. For example, options for extreme sports should be considered at suitable sites. However, forests should predominantly remain places of quiet tranquillity.

## RECOMMENDATION 20

**Maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity should be a priority in the management of all public sector open space sites.**

MALACHY CAMPBELL

**WWF NORTHERN IRELAND**



Large areas of our public sector land, such as those in and around reservoir sites, serve as buffer zones to protect water quality. Often, however, this land is then used for other purposes such as animal grazing or leased for forestry. In recent times though, it has become increasingly clear these areas should have improved land management techniques to enhance biodiversity.

In the last *Worth the Paper?* article on the management of public sector sites, the potential for enhancing biodiversity on a forested site surrounding a reservoir owned by Water Service and managed by Forest Service was explored. Unfortunately this project never got off the ground.

However, the aim in the “Recommendations to Government for a Biodiversity Strategy” to which this project was intended to contribute, namely that government departments should manage their land to enhance biodiversity, is still relevant and worth pursuing. Indeed, given the ongoing pressures on Northern Ireland’s biodiversity as reflected by the conclusions of the first report of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group (NIBG) in September 2005, it is perhaps even more important that all public authorities work in an integrated manner to help enhance the biodiversity of sites for which they have a responsibility.

This is an exciting time in environmental circles in Northern Ireland, with, amongst other things, a review of environmental governance, the review of the NI Wildlife Order and the prospect of a UK wide marine act being introduced in the next few years. It is hoped that these and other developments will address the role of public bodies, for example, through a statutory requirement for such bodies to maintain and/or improve the native biodiversity on those sites for which they are in any way responsible, either in isolation or in conjunction with partner organisations. With the ongoing pressures on our biodiversity as outlined by the NIBG report, the role of public bodies is likely to become increasingly important.

On both land and sea, government of all forms and on all levels should take the opportunities that will be presented to help Northern Ireland’s biodiversity, not just because government, maybe more readily than many other sectors, can do so much, but because there is a real need to act. Without the help of government, rather than just lamenting the decline of Northern Ireland’s biodiversity, we could be regretting the disappearance of habitats or species and by then it will be too late. The clock is ticking...

## RECOMMENDATION 21

**A more proactive approach to habitat creation using local provenance species must be taken rather than just focusing on measuring, monitoring and maintaining current habitats.**

JACKIE MORGAN

### ECOSEEDS



(SOURCE: EcoSeeds)

There is a continuing need for the growing of local provenance native wildflowers for our insects and birds. Over the years, wildflowers have all adapted to certain specific climatic conditions and come into flower and seed when birds and insects are there to pollinate them or spread seed. The concern, however, is that if we continue to import wildflower seeds then we will lose our own unique seed gene pools and we must therefore help save our unique gene bank and maintain our biodiversity.

It has been our experience over the years since the report that, although some Councils, government departments and some elements within EHS have begun to address the issue of local provenance by using locally sourced seed in their landscape schemes, others, such as NIHE, NGOs and some government departments, have not yet begun to address the issue.

It is also our experience that most organisations creating wildflower landscapes/habitats are not specifying local provenance seed. The importance of native plants is still being ignored and non-native seed is still being used.

Lobbying for the use of local provenance wildflowers in planting schemes has not taken place and no projects to create 'wildlife corridors' have begun. Only a small-scale approach to habitat creation has taken place, with little impact.

While we strongly believe that projects involving the local community are important in highlighting the issues of biodiversity, it is our belief that only large-scale *habitat creation* projects will have a significant impact on increasing biodiversity in Northern Ireland. The agenda of Flora Locale ([www.floralocale.org](http://www.floralocale.org)) should be more closely addressed in Northern Ireland.

# PUBLIC AWARENESS

## OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◇ The public should be facilitated to recognise that a healthy environment is a fundamental determinant of their quality of life.
- ◇ An approach should be adopted to 'consultation' and 'stakeholder' processes by all government departments that encourages and facilitates public participation and ownership.

## *RECOMMENDATION 22*

**Central government in its many departments and agencies should adopt at least the same level of environmental management and openness in reporting its progress as has been adopted by NI businesses and local authorities.**

GEORGE DAWSON

## ARENA NETWORK

The ARENA Network focuses on surveying NI plc on its environmental management. Having undertaken various studies and investigations in Northern Ireland, the results showed that as the survey base increased over the years, so too did the level of commitment to managing environmental impacts. However, this does not mean that there is no room for improvement as much more can still be done. Those who appear less committed need some encouragement to move forward. The aim is that everyone, from every department at every level - be it local, national or global - should be committed to environmental management.



Since 2003 limited progress has been made in achieving this recommendation. The Annual Survey of organisations conducted by ARENA Network now encompasses the health trusts, Education Boards and local universities, albeit the participation of health trusts is not universal. Local authorities have been actively involved since 2000.

Although some departments have begun to implement environmental management, there is little evidence of the concept being widely accepted across government.

## RECOMMENDATION 23

**Public interest in all environmental issues must be increased and the information people require for them to make informed decisions must be provided in an accessible format by government and NGOs.**

SUE CHRISTIE

### NORTHERN IRELAND ENVIRONMENT LINK



The period between the last report and this saw the development and demise of the Environmental Information Centre at the ECOS Centre at Ballymena. It is not our function to rehearse the reasons for this; it was unable to prove the case for its existence economically and did not gain additional funding after its initial support from the Executive Programme Funds. Probably the most unsatisfactory aspect of the sorry tale is that there will now be extreme reluctance by government to commit future funds to providing environmental information.

The situation remains, however, that people must have environmental facts and a theoretical framework available to them if they are to make informed decisions about how to live their lives and what policies they should support. If people are to make choices which lead to an improved

environment they must have both the specific information and the background education necessary to interpret that information, recognise its importance, and put it into practice.

We live in a democracy - if an issue is not deemed 'important' by the public it will not be accorded high priority by politicians, and the vicious circle of lack of knowledge leading to unsustainable actions leading to low priority for the environment will continue.

The general profile of environmental issues has risen, largely centred locally around waste management and pollution, and globally around aspects of climate change. This must be built upon and general awareness increased on all aspects of environmental matters, especially consumer and business behaviour.

## RECOMMENDATION 24

**Education and Library Boards should ensure that all schools adopt a 'whole school' approach to sustainable development, demonstrating the practical application of sustainable development principles to their staff, students and community.**

JANET WILSON

### ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS



Achieving sustainable development is a challenge facing all of us in our daily lives, be it at home, in the workplace or at school. Failing to address this issue will have serious consequences for all people and their environment.

The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have been working on a policy for sustainable development which not only integrates sustainability into the curriculum but also embraces estate management and procurement. This document has just been produced and its full implementation is eagerly awaited.

The ELBs, along with the Curriculum Council, have acknowledged the value of Ecoschools as a vehicle for the delivery of sustainable development in our schools and registration with Ecoschools has continued to increase. A new biodiversity module is to be developed in 2005/06. This represents progress but since such activities are not mandatory for delivery or inspection, uptake remains piecemeal and all too often depends on the commitment of individual teachers.

The revised curriculum has attempted to address Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to some extent but, particularly in secondary schools,

many students may miss out on this vital learning depending on the subjects they choose.

As yet, there has been no provision of in-service training on ESD for teachers and until this is addressed teachers will lack confidence in this area.

Similarly there needs to be a major focus on ESD in initial teacher training. NGO providers and others have developed many new and effective ESD programmes for schools, integrating social, economic and environmental interests - the recent partnership between CAFRE, RSPB and UWT is an example of positive development in this regard - but lack of funding and an increasing reluctance to undertake site visits for Health and Safety reasons are presenting obstacles. The closure of many of our residential outdoor education centres, which traditionally provided pupils with an opportunity to connect with the environment, is a great loss to schools, ESD and pupils.

In conclusion, while some progress has been made the original recommendation remains valid - we still need a whole school approach to sustainable development that embraces staff, students and the local community, and this requires funding and training. It needs to sit within a wider strategy for sustainable development for Northern Ireland.

## RECOMMENDATION 25

**Environment and Heritage Service should support the implementation of creative solutions to encourage changes in attitudes and behaviour regarding waste management.**

ERIC RANDALL

### BRYSON HOUSE RECYCLING



(SOURCE: Sustainable NI)

So, 2005 is over and the year of the first of the major recycling targets is upon us. We have just a few months left before we can judge whether 25% of household waste has actually been composted or recycled. My best guess is that Northern Ireland will collectively reach 15 - 20%. A failure? Well, it is current convention to point to the failures of government bodies, and I could well join in.

How about pausing for a moment and reflecting that, on the municipal waste front at least, the amount recycled will have more than trebled in five years, and waste has gained an unprecedented profile in the media and in public administration. Local authorities are now responding, in many cases stating that waste is their number one priority. And why? Is it because there is a sudden enlightened environmentalism sweeping the nation? No, of course not, the action is due to the threat of drastic EU fines.

It will be interesting to see how far local governments will go to try and push legal

compliance onto the householder. Although the public is generally better at doing things because of the intrinsic environmental benefits, it is clear that not enough people do respond consistently. The next, obvious step to mainstreaming recycling will be to enforce it.

There are of course plenty of challenges ahead. Other waste streams—commercial and industrial, agricultural, construction, to name the main culprits— remain largely untouched by direct legislation. Most worrying is the rapid growth in illegal landfill sites and commercial scale fly-tipping. For the next five years these are going to be big challenges for the waste managers.

We are still some way off breaking the link between increasing wealth and increased waste, and I fear that the age of ultimate enlightenment, the actual reduction in waste, will take yet more time to emerge. This is a challenge for far more than just waste managers.

## FULL MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

Action Renewables  
Ardoyne Focus Group  
ARENA Network  
British Ecological Society  
Bryson House  
Cavehill Conservation Campaign  
Colin Glen Trust  
EcoSeeds  
Field Studies Council  
Forest of Belfast  
Green Action Belfast  
Greencastle Area Residents Group  
International Tree Foundation  
Lenadoon Community Forum  
Monkstown Community Forum  
Mountaineering Council of Ireland  
Mourne Heritage Trust  
Northern Ireland Birdwatchers Association  
Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project  
Rural Community Network  
Rural Development Council  
Speedwell Trust  
Sustainable NI  
Sustrans  
Talnoy Avian Care Trust  
The National Trust  
The Organic Centre  
Tidy Northern Ireland  
Ulster Angling Federation  
Ulster Archaeological Society  
Ulster Architectural Heritage Society  
Ulster Coarse Fishing Federation  
Ulster Federation of Rambling Clubs  
Ulster Society for the Protection of the Countryside  
Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust  
Woodland Trust  
WWF Northern Ireland



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