Vision 2020:
Obligation through Innovation

Conference Report (06.12.13)

Executive summary

The annual Joint NIEA-NIEL-SAC conference was held at Crumlin Road Gaol on Friday 6th December 2013. The theme for the day was ***Vision 2020: Obligation through Innovation***. A brief overview of current progress towards meeting a range of statutory environmental targets was provided. Scene-setting presentations were followed by a series of workshops which facilitated discussion between representatives from the Department of the Environment and Northern Ireland Environment Agency, environmental NGOs, and practitioners.

A series of 'Big Ideas' (for example, mutual interest partnerships, ecosystem services and valuing natural capital, resource efficiency, civic pride campaign, adopting a strategic approach to land management) and associated practical actions which can offer multiple wins and accelerate progress towards achieving 2020 targets were identified.

Key messages from the day included:
- The need for fundamental, not incremental, change (in government and society as a whole);
- Partnerships are crucial – especially with the business sector so that the environment and the economy can be seen as working together;
- We need to use language that is understandable to all in presenting the case for environmental protection;
- Relentless optimism and innovation are crucial to success.

Opening Address

Terry A'Hearn (NIEA, CEO)

- There is nothing that is needed more in Northern Ireland than **innovation.**
- There is one thing we cannot do. That is to continue what we are doing now, because it is completely unsustainable.
- Fast forward twenty years – will our children/grandchildren recognise what a wastewater treatment plant is? Population growth could lead to ecosystem collapse. To keep wasting water in the way we do would be lunacy.
- We need to **change** the way we do things. For example, regulation. If we base our laws around best practice and forward thinking rather than just minimum standards, we will see change.
- We need **a rapid step change** in terms of what NIEA delivers for Northern Ireland – what can we do to increase innovation?
- There is a difference between creativity and innovation – innovation is following through to see an idea implemented and working.
- We need people to put aside process and structures and **discuss outcomes** – process should always be a means to an outcome that brings **prosperity to NI through environment and heritage excellence**.
- Economic prosperity and wellbeing is at the centre of NIEA's current message. Why? We have environmental degradation because of human activity, economy. So what we must focus on is changing society/economy (but without compromising quality of life).
- We need to work with the **business community**, through partnerships enabled by Better Regulation.
- Those who break the law should be put out of business - but those who don't should prosper through environmental excellence.

Vision 2020: Assessment of Progress

Dr Jonathan Bell (NIEL, Projects and Policy Officer)

- While some progress has certainly been made, it is clear that **we need to go much further**.
- We appear to be falling short on a lot of targets, for example, Habitats Directive, Water Framework Directive, renewable energy and transport targets.
- Important conversations need to be had to identify Big Ideas and practical actions to help us deliver multiple benefits and outputs and achieve our obligations (from EU to NI PfG).
- Innovative and creative ideas and solutions need to be identified.

Setting the Scene

Prof. Sue Christie (NIEL, CEO)

- We need to change – but how do we get there?
- Paradigm shift needed:
    - From **'clean it up'** to **'prevent it happening'**
    - From **'improve recycling rates'** to **'resource efficiency targets'**
    - From **'species and habitats'** to **'ecosystems and their services'**
    - From **'designate sites'** to **'pay for ecosystem services'**
    - From **'produce "two blades of grass where one grew before"'** to **'Deliver multiple goods and services'**
    - From **'the polluter pays (to repair damage)'** to **'society pays (for the services nature provides)'**
    - From **'direct government action'** to **'enable communities'**
    - From **'hold the line'** to **'managed realignment'**
    - From **'trust technology'** to **'value resource efficiency and ecosystem services'**

Workshops

The first workshop was based around the theme *'Many to Few'* – the simple idea that if we focus on few 'Big Ideas' and implement them well, we can achieve many targets.

Workshop groups were asked to:

- Identify a number of Big Ideas that are going to help deliver multiple targets
- Identify barriers that may prevent us from fulfilling such a target or adopting such a concept
- Identify practical actions or mechanisms to help deliver this approach or target and to overcome any barriers identified
- Identify the multiple benefits and targets your Big Idea will help fulfil
- Identify stakeholders, policies and activities that need to be better coordinated and integrated to realise your Big Idea

The outcomes of this workshop are summarised in the table below.

A Conceptual Idea or Overarching Target	Barriers	Practical Actions/Mechanisms	Multiple Benefits	Who, why and when
SuDs (essentially, the idea that each development/organisation deals with its own drainage on its own curtilage.	- Current practice - Ignorance, unwillingness to change - Mind-set and policy - Financing	- Educate, demonstrate success - Make people pay for dealing with drainage - Financial incentives – savings, tax relief? - PPS15 as a driver?	- Part of the solution of flooding and also water quality issues - Wildlife, biodiversity - Involves the community – educates - Efficiency, saves money - Rainwater harvesting as a part of SuDs - Amenity	- Planning Service - Drainage professionals – Rivers Agency, Water Service, Roads Service, NIEA, Local Government, developers and contractors - Communities
Ecosystem Services Approach (deals with the whole landscape rather than designation of individual sites)	- Lack of understanding - Current practice - Environment Vs Economy mind-set - Cost – transition from one way of doing things to another - Current policy framework (designating / reporting etc.) - Short-term politics - CAP is too blunt an instrument - Capacity building around the farming sector	- Land Use Strategy for NI - Biodiversity / Habitat Management Plans - Payments for Ecosystem Services (from who?!) - Mapping Ecosystem Services in NI to identify multifunctional, high value land. Produce Natural Capital Asset Index for NI - Influence supply chains - Demonstration of short-term wins – pound signs to farmers	- Sites and species - Goes beyond designation - Community understanding, promotion of scientific worldview - People see having high value land as rewarded – not a reason for regulation	- Farmers, landowners - All Government Departments (do these structures need to be radically changed?) - An Ecosystem Services Task Force for NI, with all Government Departments represented - NGOs an intermediary between buyers and sellers of Ecosystem Services - UFU - NITB

Landscape scale conservation (including urban landscape)	- Lack of understanding – how and why? - Public access restrictions - Landownership patterns (fragmented pockets of land) - Presumption in favour of development - Absence of Area Development Plans - Apathy - Finance - Built heritage – lack of skills, VAT	- Community involvement, practical demonstration of success - Partnership working - Incentives (in terms of built heritage and construction industry) - Rural development programme can facilitate groups to work together at landscape scale. Facilitator needed to encourage mutually beneficial partnerships - Challenge Fund as a good example - Land Use Strategy, resource map - Improved governance	- Community connection – people see why it is relevant to them - Through access, people value the landscape more	
Catchment Approach	- Blinkered vision within government - Process driven rather than outcome driven – restrictive - DoE solely focus on water quality as be all and end all - Knowledge deficit - Off-loading of responsibility between multiple agencies and Departments - Local government boundaries aren't aligned with catchment areas - Fragmented system of land tenure (difficulty getting hundreds of small farmers on board) - Intensification of agriculture (agri-	- Payments to farmers to let land flood - Skilled negotiation at local level - Resources to explore practical issues on the ground with landowners – build trust and buy-in - PR hearts and minds job - Payments for catchment approach - Dissemination of best practice – case studies and field visits elsewhere - Bring together all necessary partners	- Managing wild fires - Delivering on ecosystem services - More integrated invasive species approach - Reduce flood risk - Improve flood management - Riverside access (tourism benefits) - Community stability (building social capital) - Hydro power – develop better understanding of the capabilities of our water courses - Improve water quality	- Catchment working groups – how do we make this structure more effective – currently a talking shop - Government need to take a leap rather than tinker - Link up the local bodies on the ground more effectively – utilise existing bodies - More projects funded at the local scale - Better partnership working between bodies at different levels

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	food strategy) - Commercial interference politically - Farming every last inch of land – deterioration in semi-natural grassland - Difficulty integrating different communities and multiple stakeholders within one catchment area		(WFD) - Minimise EU infraction - Delivery on Floods Directive - Better cooperation between land managers and authorities - Promote "excellence" rather than regulatory "compliance"	- Planning system needs to be better aware of what it takes to implement a catchment approach
Rights of Nature / Wild law	- Our current legal system - Political and public perceptions – foreign concept to put nature at the heart of our legal system - Too radical for NI - Economic emphasis in Europe - Fear of locking up systems with expensive court action - Danger of being seen as a purely green/environmental issue	- Community movement to influence government and encourage legal change - Sell this as a community issue	- Mainstream environment within decision-making , then less need for regulation - Create a NI legal justice group to provide legal advice to local groups - Ambiguity of ownership of the problems - Innovative form of regulation - Increased environmental clout - Empowers individuals/communities - Increased environmental clout - Raises profile of environment - Brings environment onto equal footing with economic and social considerations- realising SD finally	

Transport (free public transport, with priority for cyclists in the city centre)	- Government priority is the movement of vehicles rather than the movement of people (mind-set) - General attitudes and habits of society - Ancillary facilities to make this a realistic option - Wider planning considerations – spatial layout of our centres to encourage certain behaviours - Cost of change from private to public transport emphasis - Technology, infrastructure - Lack of remote working in NI	- More Park & Ride facilities - Innovative means of doing business – more video conferencing - Free bikes, free bus passes - One car lane in city centre, rest for public transport - Actions to change image of public transport in NI - Service improvements to existing public transport - Multifunctional work spaces to save people travel – Civil Service could be leading on this	- Health benefits - GHG emission reduction - Cost reductions	- Civil Service could / should lead on some of the practical actions - Private sector
Biodiversity and Business	- Lack of understanding, dissemination of message to industry re: value of the environment - Lack of knowledge in business sector (given the life cycle of a business, they are not generally concerned with the degradation of the environment they are relying on	- Shift of understanding from small number of businesses to the wider sector - Businesses sponsoring native species relating to their product (for example, Magners associated with Bees) - Businesses recognise the value of the environment to achieve their business outcome (for example, value of pollination) - Environmental education - Use businesses with a history of getting things done / promoting	- Environmental profit and loss accounting in business as well as traditional financial records - Biodiversity benefits – multiple	- Make sure NIEA are a partner, not a barrier

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		behavioural change		
'Localisation' (local stewardship – community building, shared resources, people look after their own area)	- Not possible for everything - Throw-away culture, cost of replacing is often cheaper than repairing	- Local equivalent to Invest NI to promote local level entrepreneurship - Information / awareness to use by-products (for example, waste broker directorate) - Online material exchange (local exchange economies) - Upcycling in locality - Putting in place structures and processes for civic amenity sites to prevent things from being sent to landfill / lost from the system	- Stronger commitment to local area, ownership of locality - Reduced transport costs - Better awareness of the consequences of actions – seen in your locality	
'Mutual Interest Partnerships'	- Risk averse - Silo approach - Partners never meet	- Develop a prosperity agreement which identifies mutual interest	- Win-win for partners - Goes beyond targets - Increases scope and ambition (the goal is prosperity)	- Can be led by any sector - Government could kick-start through a few pilot schemes - Publicise successful examples!
Climate change adaptation	- Lack of understanding and awareness - Lack of political buy-in - Timescale uncertainty	- Making climate change locally relevant - Educate, promote interest groups	- Adaptation as a 'hook' for starting discussions	

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Open discussion and reflection on 'Big Ideas'

- **Mutual interest partnerships**
  - This could be an effective way of driving behavioural change – by working through mutual interest, rather than brow-beating people.
  - Risk averseness of government and the NGO sector is a problem.
  - People are not necessarily aware of potential partners with mutual interests.
  - Groups would set up 'prosperity agreements', through partnership forums where they can find groups with the same interests and objectives.

  Feedback:

  - Partnerships need both sides to work. People who get things done on the ground are needed.

  - Government cannot afford to do it all themselves anymore – they need to trust people and organisations more for true partnerships to work. There is a vast array of potential volunteer labour that could be tapped into.

- **The rights of nature / 'wild law'**
  - Does nature itself have rights? Could a river sue for damage from pollution, or a mountain for damage from a wildfire?
  - This idea is very radical. Constitutions are currently rigid and do not capture nature. Lack of understanding around the legal system.
  - We need to empower local communities to take responsibility for their land. Could there be an environmental justice advisory group, to give legal planning and ecological advice?

  Feedback:

  - If this idea was brought into the mainstream, who would decide whose rights are most important? Presumably the rights of humanity would trump the rights of nature?
  - The radicalism of the idea is laudable, and the fact that it suggests that people should not necessarily be the primary reason for environmental protection. However, realistically, if we are going to have environmental safeguards, it is because of the value of the environment to *people*.

- **Ecosystems Services and valuing Natural Capital**
  - Designation of individual sites is failing (reflected in Jonathan Bell's talk on assessment of progress towards targets). We need a more holistic approach to the protection of nature and its services.
  - Landowners are the key to the implementation of this idea.
  - There is currently perhaps a lack of understanding over what is valued.

- The approach involves community and raising awareness of the value of nature. It promotes the idea that the environment and economy should not be in conflict.
- Should involve all government Departments, NGO sector, landowners.

Feedback:

- How do we engage the business community with this? Through efficiency and cost savings.
- Agreement that this is an important way forward, but concern expressed that the Department's track record on delivering does not instil confidence.

- **Civic pride campaign**
  - People need to be more aware not only of their rights, but of their responsibilities too. People *do* want to do the right thing and *do* take pride in their environment – they would get behind a civic pride campaign. If people take pride in their local environment, they will deal with problems that make their place a better place to live and visit.
  - The labelling of such a campaign, a motto or logo, is essential. NITB had huge success with their 'our time, our place' campaign, which was very widely supported and non-contentious.

- **Sustainable transport system**
  - We have to make sustainable transport the easy option for people, not more difficult than private car travel. An example of this would be to introduce a single car lane, and have other lanes for other forms of sustainable transport.
  - The main problem lies in the attitude of society to public transport.

  Feedback:

  - You cannot solve a problem with the same kind of thinking with which you created it – i.e. more roads / cars is not the answer.

- **Sustainable Catchment Management**
  - Manages land holistically and recognises the connectedness of ecosystems, natural processes, consequences of upstream/downstream activity, over land area.
  - The way in which government is currently divided up does not make implementation straightforward.
  - Knowledge deficit.

- **Signing MLAs up to be champions of nature**
  - 'Pair' MLAs with species, places, etc. (example of the current MLA/scientist pairing scheme). Use the existing interests of MLAs.
  - NIEA would have a role to sell this to politicians.

- **Sustainable food cities**
  - Benefits of promoting sustainable food and the local economy. Celebrating what is good about local produce.
  - This ties-in with the 'localisation' idea in the table above – idea is transferable to other spheres.

- **Plastic bottle levy**
  - Idea akin to the carrier bag levy
  - Alternatively, the introduction of a container deposit scheme could be considered to encourage the re-use of plastic bottles. A deposit-refund system would involve imposing a deposit on plastic bottles at the point of sale, with the deposit being refunded at the point of return. Such a system 'adds value' to empty bottles – it incentivises good behaviour and contributes to increased recycling whilst at the same time discouraging littering.

- **Resource efficiency**
  - Cradle to cradle - manufacturing should aim to produce things that can be split back into component parts and recycled.
  - Recycling our towns and cities and villages. We have created donuts – holes in the middle of our settlements. We should encourage the recycling/reuse of town centres.

Closing Remarks

Terry A'Hearn (NIEA, CEO)

- **Transformational, not incremental, change is needed.**
- The message needs to be positive – not 'reduce', but 'enjoy'. This came through in discussions.
- Make NI a world leader, because it has the capacity to be so. NI has a talented, well-trained workforce, with natural strengths. For example, we are the best in Europe at the European Heritage Open Days.
- Partnerships – a variety of thoughts have been expressed on this theme, from big, all-embracing to small projects. How do outcomes change mind-sets systemically/endemically?
- Language is important. 'Ecosystem services' is specialised language. Shouldn't be used in most spheres.
- Sharing risk and reward, through multiplicity of stakeholders and interests.
- MLAs as champions for nature could be a great success.
- Hold NIEA to account to make some of these things happen.