

Local Government Bill

Comments by

Northern Ireland Environment Link

12 November 2013

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the networking and forum body for non-statutory organisations concerned with the environment of Northern Ireland. Its 62 Full Members represent over 90,000 individuals, 262 subsidiary groups, have an annual turnover of £70 million and manage over 314,000 acres of land. Members are involved in environmental issues of all types and at all levels from the local community to the global environment. NIEL brings together a wide range of knowledge, experience and expertise which can be used to help develop policy, practice and implementation across a wide range of environmental fields.

These comments are made on behalf of Members, but some members may be providing independent comments as well. If you would like to discuss these comments further we would be delighted to do so.

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NIEL welcomes the opportunity to engage with the Environment Committee on its call for written evidence regarding the Local Government Bill. We welcome the introduction of the Bill, and support the overall aims and principles which the reform process seeks to achieve. Our comments and recommendations largely focus on the introduction of the new power of community planning and while we are broadly supportive of the Bill we have identified a number of issues where improvements could be made to enhance and strengthen the Bill for the benefit of local and central government, people and communities.

Our proposals seek to achieve the following objectives:

- (a) To provide a framework for real and meaningful partnership work between councils, statutory agencies and communities;
- (b) To enable community planning to reach out to and engage people in all communities;
- (c) To focus the work of community planning on outcomes which make a meaningful difference and on improving the co-ordination and delivery of public services in communities and constituencies.

The environment sector would stress the opportunity for the creation of green spaces and wild places in community planning. Links between health and wellbeing and the wider environment are proven and very important, and the natural environment should have full representation in the development of community plans to ensure optimisation of community benefits (the flow of ecosystem services to local communities). The sector would appreciate being involved in discussion at local government level in the future.

NIEL fully endorses the views of the Community Planning Manifesto Group, submitted by Community Places. For specific comments, please see this document.