



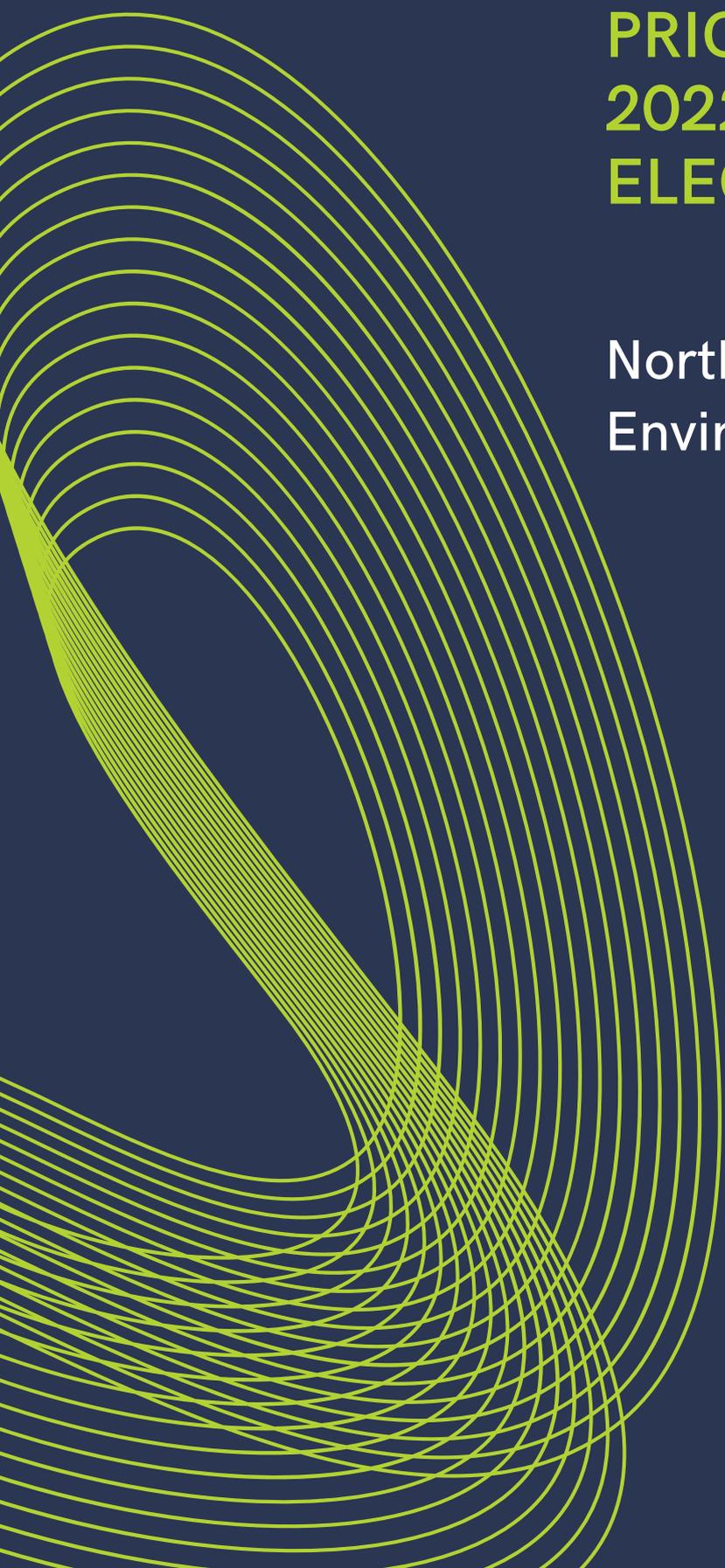
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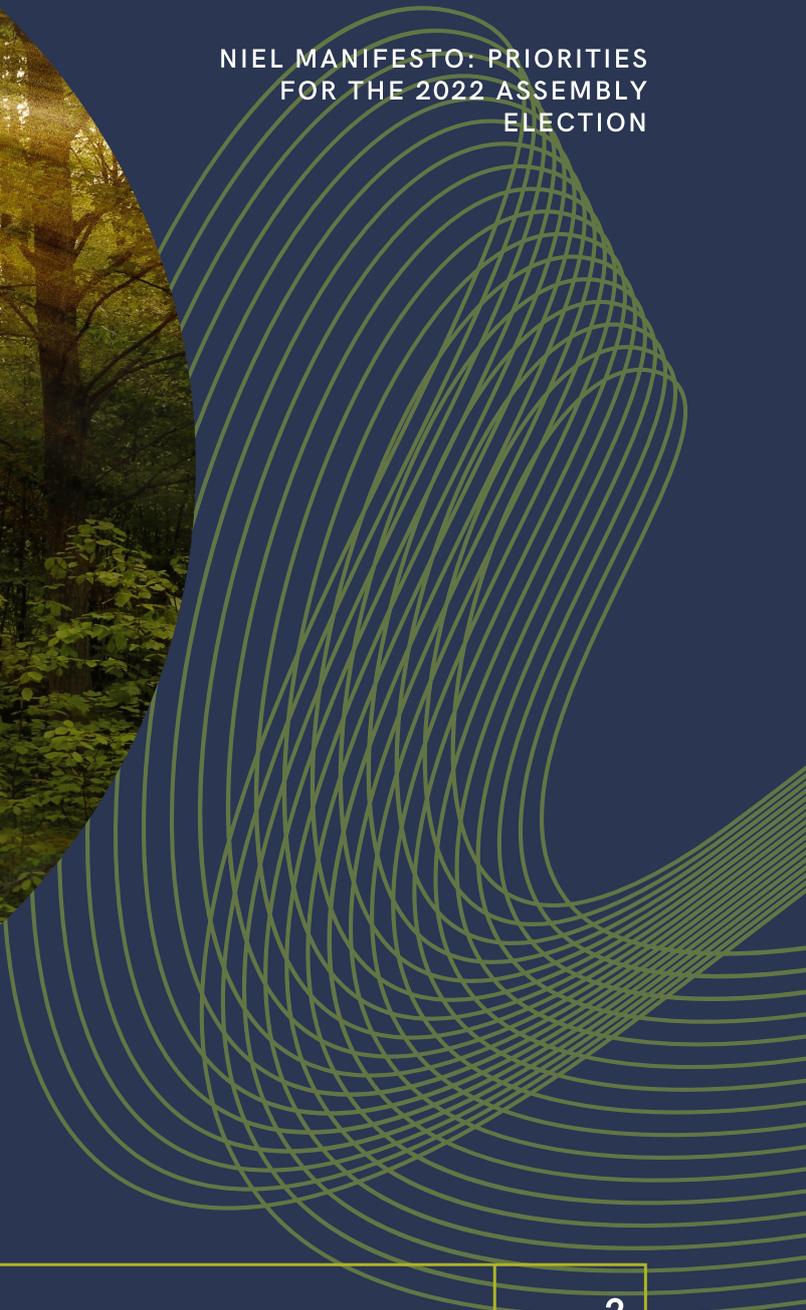
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MARCH 2022

# **NIEL MANIFESTO: PRIORITIES FOR THE 2022 ASSEMBLY ELECTION**

Northern Ireland  
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# NORTHERN IRELAND ENVIRONMENT LINK

## ABOUT

### Introduction

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL), the umbrella body for environmental organisations in Northern Ireland, has published the following manifesto on behalf of the environment sector.

In the lead up to the Assembly elections in May, NIEL has consulted with its members who have put forward 22 priorities for 2022 and beyond.

Our environment can deliver for health, through spaces and places that people want to be active in. It can deliver for the economy through tourism, cultural heritage, and a clean green image that attracts inward investment. It can deliver for education through encouraging engagement with the natural world and applied sciences. It can deliver for our future wellbeing and security.

For ease of reading these priorities have been presented under three main headings, namely, "Nature & Environment", "Climate Crisis & Economy" and "People & Wellbeing".

### About NIEL

NIEL is the networking and forum body for non-statutory organisations concerned with the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland. Its 66 Full Members represent 190,000 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.



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# NATURE & ENVIRONMENT

## Environmental Governance

Fulfil the commitment in “New Decade, New Approach” to establish an independent Environmental Protection Agency to oversee and enforce all relevant environmental legislation in collaboration with corresponding bodies across the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

## Freshwater

Strengthen European Water Policy standards and legislation so that all NI waters achieve target of Good Ecological Status as defined by the Water Framework Directive by 2027 and that adequate funding and structures are in place to effectively manage our water resources.

## Restoring Nature

Introduction of ambitious targets in law to halt and reverse the systemic loss of biodiversity and put nature on the path to recovery by 2030, including ensuring the effective protection and management of at least 30% of land and sea for nature and people by 2030. The implementation of an ambitious Environment Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy containing nature restoration targets set in law will be key components in achieving this goal.

## Land use

Work across government to improve the sustainability of agriculture based upon the UN Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring that any future payments related to farming and land management must be based on the recipient meeting ambitious regulatory standards based upon the principle of public money for public goods.

# NATURE & ENVIRONMENT

## Historic Environment

Deliver a new Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy for Northern Ireland, which provides an evidence-based set of priorities for these sectors to recover, renew and thrive in a climate resilient world.

## Woodland

Make the most of trees and woods for benefit of climate, nature and people. This can be done by planting more locally sourced and grown trees to meet Northern Ireland's woodland cover target of 12% by 2050; and looking after the trees and woods we have by ensuring that all ancient and long-established woodland is in favourable management by 2030 and is urgently provided with "wholly exceptional" protection.

## Marine Environment

Develop and implement an ambitious overarching vision for the sustainable management of our seas which balances economic and social benefits while ensuring the health of the marine environment, in line with the UK Marine Policy Statement vision for "clean, healthy, safe and biologically diverse oceans and seas".

## Peatland

Develop and implement a NI Peatland Strategy that recognises the wide range of ecosystem services peatlands and other wetlands deliver for society with a specific target for 95% of the habitat area to be under positive management by 2025 and the remainder by 2035.

# CLIMATE CRISIS & ECONOMY

## Climate Change

With the imminent introduction of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Act - which includes the need to set carbon budgets, sectoral plans, public body reporting, set up a Climate Commissioner and a Just Transition Commission - it is vital that the resources needed for Climate Action (both mitigation and adaptation) are prioritised across all departments to ensure that we transform effectively into a net zero, carbon resilient society.

## Clean Energy

Presumption against all new fossil fuel extraction and infrastructure. The NI energy sector should have a target of 100% low-carbon energy by 2050, or net zero carbon, with an aspiration to reach the target earlier.

## Green New Deal

Introduction of a Green New Deal, which includes financial incentives for green initiatives for domestic and business users, and sets targets for active participation in the clean, green or circular economy.

## Waste prevention and the circular economy

Alignment of Northern Ireland policies to deliver the Circular Economy Package to address: waste prevention and resource efficiency; effective management of plastics; creation of economic opportunities along the supply chain; improved citizen awareness and commitment through behavioural change interventions and effective communication and reduction of marine littering.

# CLIMATE CRISIS & ECONOMY

## Transport

Ensure that transport spend is evenly split between roads and public transport, similar to the spending pattern in other UK administrations. Ensure that the number of journeys by public transport reaches 10% by the end of 2025 with a separate annual budget for active travel including a minimum of £12.5 million for cycling safe infrastructure which meets the LTN 1/20 Cycle infrastructure design standards.

## Infrastructure

Establishment of an Infrastructure Commission for long term, expert led, strategic approach to long term infrastructure planning, with a particular focus on public engagement.

## Tourism

Creation of a sustainable tourism charter for Northern Ireland, supported by a sustainable tourism strategy based on a different metric for measuring success in the tourism industry, replacing the volume based economic model with a sustainability value model that seeks to balance economic, social and environmental considerations to ensure the special places that people come to visit are managed and protected for future generations of visitors and residents.



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# PEOPLE & WELL-BEING

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## Well-being

Introduction of a Well-being of Future Generations Act. Based on the Welsh model, this would aim to bring our society together to achieve common objectives around improving well-being for everyone.

## Landscape

Create a wide-ranging landscape strategy for Northern Ireland, which includes a review of current management arrangements and brings NI, at least, up to standard with the rest of the UK. Given the gaps in policy for landscapes here, this needs to be progressed urgently, if we are to face the climate and nature crises while also addressing the pressures and opportunities arising from a dramatic increase in outdoor recreation.

## Food

Development and implementation of a cross-departmental Food Strategy for NI, to include a sustainable food security plan based on DAERA's vision for "A transformed food system that protects natural resources for future generations, is economically and environmentally sustainable, and provides safe, nourishing, accessible food to people".

## Access and outdoor recreation

Introduction of new legislation to maintain and expand access to the outdoors, including a responsibility on district councils to provide new green and blue infrastructure and to work with the Department of Health and health providers to develop and deliver cross cutting win-win environmental based therapies including social prescriptions.

# PEOPLE & WELL-BEING

## Behaviour change

Full implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in NI with annual progress reports/ assessment of implementation of the SDGs.

## Education and awareness

Utilisation of green space for educational purposes. All educators receive training to develop skills to use nature as a vehicle for learning so that every child receives a set period of outdoor learning in nature every week. We want Nature and the Climate Crisis to be at the heart of the NI Curriculum.

## Community Rights

Develop a Community Rights Act which enables citizens here to have a greater voice in community and spatial planning and in the collective management and ownership of land and buildings.

