



*Northern Ireland*  
**environment**  
**link**

A photograph of a dense forest of beech trees. The trees have many curved, light-colored trunks that twist and turn as they reach for the sky. The canopy is filled with bright green leaves, and the overall scene is one of natural beauty and complexity.

**2021 - 22**  
**Annual Report**

Our vision is for a **valued, resilient, healthy environment**

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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 inform and influence policy and practice impacting on the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland. Our 68 Full Members represent 190,000 individuals, attract 1.5m visitors per annum and have an annual turnover of over £65 million in Northern Ireland. NIEL also has over 40 Associate Members composed of statutory organisations, companies and individuals with an interest in the environment. Northern Ireland Environment Link's Vision is for 'a valued, resilient, healthy environment'.

Board		
<b>Chair</b>	Stephen Aston (Independent Member)	
<b>Vice Chair</b>	Joanne Sherwood (RSPB NI)	
<b>Hon. Treasurer</b>	Murray Watt (Supporting Communities NI)	
<b>Co Secretary</b>	Craig McGuicken (NIEL)	
<b>Trustees</b>	Paul Armstrong (The Woodland Trust) Ian Humphreys (Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful) Karen Kerr (Queen's University Belfast) Dawn Miskelly (Ulster Wildlife) Ian Nuttall (Independent Member) Lizzy Pinkerton (Belfast Hills Partnership) Darren Rice (Ring of Gullion AONB) Diane Ruddock (National Trust) Caroline Winder (Action Renewables)	
Staff		
<b>Staff</b>	Craig McGuicken – Chief Executive Officer	
	Sean Kelly – Development Manager	
	Malachy Campbell – Senior Policy Officer	
	Jill Eagleson – Policy & Projects Officer	
	Portia Woods – Policy Officer	Joined May 2021
	Ruari Fairtlough – Finance Manager	
	Iona Meyer – Network, Events and Membership Coordinator	
	Connor McLean – Policy & IT Officer	
	Dr Jane McCullough – Climate NI Manager	
	Dr Jade Berman – Climate Resilience Researcher (TaIX Project)	
	Stephen Jones – Climate NI Project Officer	
	Amy Bell – Climate NI Programme Assistant	
	Perla Mansour – Climate NI Mitigation Officer	
	Alan Kennedy-Asser – UK Climate Resilience Programmed Embedded Researcher	Joined October 2021
	Lucy Keown – Open Government Network Coordinator	
	Kerry Melville – Belfast Food Network Coordinator	

## A View from NIEL



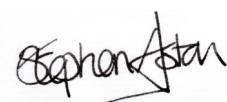
How many Global Climate Change Summits does it take to change a planet?

It seems as if the world's economy and environment remain in a binary rather than harmonic state. There is progressive agreement on the science, progressive promises of action, but actual progress on managing and mitigating climate change is glacial. Too few announcements are translating into actions. Further international reticence centred on: "I will if you will", presents a high risk of failure to recover, either because measures will be applied too late or the scale of costs will become overwhelming.

That said, there have been real developments in energy and transport, and substantial initiatives on environmental protection. Positive steps that provide very real hope. Although it is reasonable to expect more from world leaders we also need to recognise the part we play. The work of NIEL is a marvellous example of what can be achieved with a dedicated team, committed members and trustees, and a collaborative approach. This year NIEL responded in detail to more than 20 policy consultations and was directly involved in more than 22 events. The Climate Coalition NI worked with great success to inform and influence the NI Climate Bill. Climate NI brilliantly led the 'All Together Now: Collaboration for Local Climate Action' session at the Glasgow COP talks. Innovative work with Nourish NI and on "Social Prescribing" also stand out as a remarkable examples of achievement, and all of this was accomplished, undeterred by the constraints of Covid. The NIEL e-Bulletin provided excellent communications throughout and I am delighted by the staff's splendid application. I offer my huge thanks to them and to Craig who has been pivotal to NIEL's success.

We are all involved in a race against time. The writer and environmentalist, Gary Snyder, suggested that: "Nature is not a place to visit. It is a home". But if humans carry on destroying our shared habitats and altering the climate then an ever increasing number of plants and animal species are under threat – as they are, so are we.

The answer to the question (that I began with) is not 27. Neither is it 'blowing in the wind'. The answer is within each of us. As we celebrate the birth of the eight billionth child, we must rise to the challenge of making a real difference. As we look to secure their future we must continue to lead and shape changes through programmes, partnerships and people. Changes that enable nature to maintain the balance, diversity and abundance of the planet's species.



Stephen Aston, NIEL Chair



This Annual Report will be my last as NIEL CEO. It has been a real privilege to work with such a talented, dedicated group of people, and I am particularly pleased that there have been some notable recent successes.

The passing of Northern Ireland's first Climate Change Act together with the establishment of the new Office for Environmental Protection, are both important milestones. It's worth noting too the important role that NIEL members have had in both of these, through the work of the Climate Coalition and the NIEL Brexit Coalition.

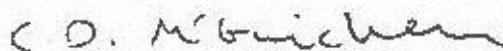
Of course, much of our work is based around communicating and advocating for policy change. This is really important, but there is sometimes a feeling that we are treading water, waiting for Government to progress a specific area.

Looking back over my time at NIEL, I think that one of the things we have done well, is to be proactive in finding ways to help our members, and hopefully strengthen the entire sector. We've delivered a wide range of programmes such as - the Challenge Fund (we distributed £4.5m to hundreds of local, voluntary organisations), the Catalyst Programme (delivered fundraising capacity-building training to the environment and heritage sectors), set up NI Environment Week, and were founding members of the NI Open Government Network. One of my favourite moments was when we presented to the European Environment Committee, and managed to alter the wording of the EU Resolution.

In recent years we have been looking at other ways to 'expand' our sphere of influence. We are about to begin a social prescribing project with our partners in the Healthy Living Centres Alliance, and we have just completed some research into the need and opportunity to link more effectively with minority ethnic groups.

Along the way there have been some difficult moments, to which we had to react quickly. The sudden jolt of the pandemic shocked everyone, and NIEL had an important role in advocating for new ways of working and resourcing. No-one in the sector will forget the financial crisis in 2015-16, when many of us received letters noting that our funding from NIEA would be concluding. Our campaign was the most effective that I've ever been involved in.

I would like to conclude by thanking all of the staff and Board Members that I have worked with over the years. I have really appreciated your support and incredibly hard work, and I feel that we have achieved a lot together. To the Members, it's been a privilege working with you, and I wish you all the best for the future.



Craig McGuicken, NIEL Chief Executive

## Introduction

This annual report details the activities and initiatives delivered by NIEL in accordance with the organisation's purposes for the public benefit:

- ◆ Advance and promote for the public benefit environmental conservation, protection, improvement and sustainability in NI
- ◆ Raise awareness of environmental issues by providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and promoting a collective voice on environmental matters
- ◆ Advance the education of all sections of the public in environmental and ecological sciences.

The Board of Directors have had due regard to Charity Commission guidance in the preparation of this report.

## Strategic Aim 1: Environmental Policy & Advocacy

*Advance the conservation, management and access of the environment through development of relevant policy and advocacy*

### DAERA Stakeholder Engagement

NIEL's interaction with DAERA is a core element of our work which benefits both our members and DAERA alike. Our liaison with DAERA officials and our participation in joint fora and various stakeholder groups means we provide a co-ordinated and coherent voice for the eNGO sector on a wide range of environmental issues. NIEL continued to represent the views of the sector on a number of key DAERA fora throughout the year including: the Agri-Food Stakeholder Forum; the Wildfire Stakeholder Forum and the Ammonia Stakeholder Group.



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)



## Brexit

As the out-workings of the UK decision to leave the EU continued to emerge, NIEL remained very active in raising awareness of the environmental implications of the referendum result. Central to this work was the contribution from our Brexit related groups on: Agriculture & Land-Use, Nature & Environmental Protection, Fisheries & Marine and Cross Border Environmental Working. Through these working groups we ensured that our sectoral voice was heard through on-going liaison with political parties, civil servants and other key decision-makers. NIEL also facilitated wider engagement and information sharing through our participation in the DAERA Environmental EU Exit Stakeholder Forum. NIEL has also been an active member of the NI Civic Working Group on the Protocol. Throughout the year, we have taken the opportunity to raise environmental issues regarding the NI/Ireland Protocol with senior UK and EU officials.

## Environmental Governance

The Environment Act (2021) was approved by the NI Assembly on 22nd February 2022. The Act brought into force a range of environmental measures, including a new legal framework for environmental governance and accountability now that the UK has left the EU. Key elements of this framework are statutory duties on DAERA to publish an Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP), issue a policy statement on environmental principles, and the extension of the remit of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) to include Northern Ireland. NIEL has been working with DAERA and the OEP on the development of these new governance arrangements. Key activities include hosting information sessions on the Draft Environment Strategy for NI (Our first EIP) and participation in the OEP Stakeholder Forum.

## **Environmental Governance & Cooperation - The North-South, East-West Dimension**

Co-operation with our colleagues in the Irish Environmental Network (IEN) continued to flourish throughout the year. Highlights included delivery of a workshop with academic institutions North and South through our ‘Environmental Governance in the Island of Ireland Network’. We examined the differing approaches to Climate Change on the island of Ireland in October 2021 and secured additional resources to commission research to examine how the environment sector, right across the island of Ireland, can best come together to deal with the range of issues and concerns that we are facing. This research builds on previous joint work between NIEL and IEN, including our report, ‘Brexit, the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and the Environment: Issues arising and possible solutions’. This new research project will also include consideration of best practice on Cross-Border and EU/Non-EU linkages.

Similarly, we continued to participate in the Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation (with a range of organisations from NI and Ireland). This ensures meaningful consultation between cross-border civil society and regional, national and EU bodies on matters relevant to cooperation between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and between the island of Ireland and Great Britain.

Environment Links UK, which comprises the combined memberships of NIEL, Wildlife and Countryside Link (England), Scottish Environment Link, and Wales Environment Link continued to work with Greener UK to set out our recommendations for how the UK and devolved governments should work together to protect and enhance the environment as we leave the EU.





Environment Act 2021

2021 CHAPTER 30

An Act to make provision about targets, plans and policies for improving the natural environment; for statements and reports about environmental protection; for the Office for Environmental Protection; about waste and resource efficiency; about air quality; for the recall of products that fail to meet environmental standards; about water; about nature and biodiversity; for conservation covenants; about the regulation of chemicals; and for connected purposes.  
[9th November 2021]

BE IT ENACTED by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

PART I  
ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE  
CHAPTER I  
IMPROVING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT  
*Environmental targets*



## Environmental Governance & Cooperation - The North-South, East-West Dimension cont'd.

Work included monitoring and influencing the design and implementation of The Environment Act (2021) and in particular, the NI Provisions. We sought to highlight the risks arising from divergence in environmental regulation across the UK.

NIEL also addressed a major UK conference in May 2021 entitled 'Shaping the Future of Environmental Protection - Environment Bill Governance Arrangements in Northern Ireland' for the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment.

## NIEL Environmental Scorecard for NI

An environmental scorecard for NI was produced in March 2022. It evaluated the level of progress in NI towards achieving certain statutory environmental targets and is available [here](#). It followed on from the NIEL 2021 scorecard which reviewed certain environmental indicators, some of which were also used in the draft programme for Government (PfG) 2016-21 in Northern Ireland. A new PfG for the period 2022-27 has still not been published, something NIEL hopes will be rectified in the very near future.

## NI Assembly Election 2022 and Hustings Event

In advance of the Assembly election in May 2022, NIEL hosted an environmental hustings event which was attended by representatives from the Alliance party, DUP, Green Party, SDLP, Sinn Féin and UUP. The hustings was chaired by former BBC broadcaster Seamus McKee.

NIEL also prepared a [manifesto](#) for the 2022 election which formed the basis for much of the discussion on the night.

**Environmental Hustings 2022**  
21st April 2022

NIEL is inviting you to an Environmental Hustings on 21st April in advance of the Assembly Elections in May 2022.

The event will be held online via Zoom from 7pm - 9pm.

Chaired by Seamus McKee, this event is an opportunity to hear from our political parties on their environmental priorities and commitments.

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## Nature Targets

NIEL has been working with the other links to progress a project to forge a common, four country position to advocate for ambitious but vital international biodiversity targets.

### *Land and Sea for Nature's Recovery in Northern Ireland*

Our biodiversity is in crisis. If we want a resilient and prosperous future, we need to take bold steps now. We need:

- ◆ The introduction of ambitious targets in law to reverse the systemic loss of biodiversity and put nature on the path to recovery by 2030
- ◆ The effective protection and management of at least 30% of land and sea for nature and people by 2030 (30x30).

Please see [30x30: Land for Nature's Recovery in Northern Ireland](#) and [Nature Targets for NI's Seas](#).

The implementation of both an ambitious Environment Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy containing nature restoration targets set in law will be key components in achieving nature's recovery.

### *The post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework*

Biodiversity in Northern Ireland sits within a broader international context, notably the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which came into force in 1993. The Aichi Biodiversity Targets agreed by 196 countries under the CBD in 2010, aimed to halt the loss of biodiversity globally by 2020. However, we failed to take the actions to achieve this. The Environment Links UK report, 'Achieving Harmony with Nature', outlines how to ensure a strong Global Biodiversity Framework, to help restore nature across the UK. Our recommendations cover 5 key areas on which the four governments of the UK should take action. To read the report in full, click [here](#).



### Achieving harmony with nature

How to ensure COP15 helps restore nature across the four countries of the UK

Summary report

February 2022



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



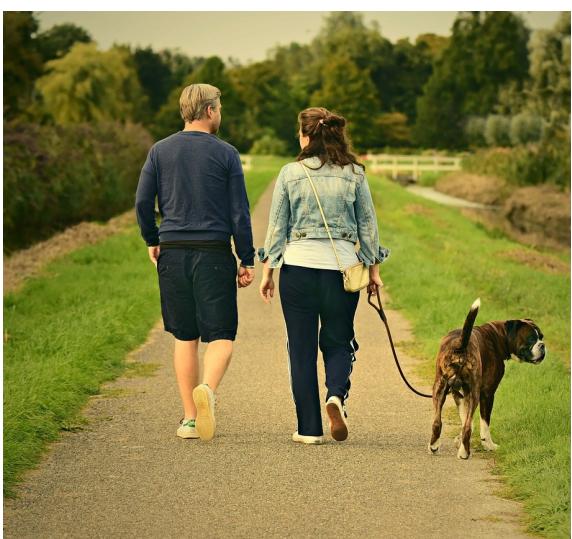
## Health

In the past few years, particularly through the pandemic, NIEL has worked closely with our members to progress work around health and environment. The benefits of nature to our health and wellbeing are more clearly understood and documented than ever. This gives a strong impetus to take action to increase and improve the capacity for people to engage with nature.

NIEL's Health Working Group is advocating for:

- ◆ Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) maintaining legal commitments in areas such as public health, environmental protection and social equality.
- ◆ Introduction of a Well-Being of Future Generations Act for NI. This would help create the legislative footing for a society that we all want to live in, ensuring all sectors are working towards the same well-being goals.
- ◆ Creation of a new Outdoor Recreation Bill for NI to provide and expand access for the purpose of recreation.
- ◆ Development of a Walking Strategy for NI to enable a society where everyone benefits from walking as part of their everyday journeys, with easy access to places designed to promote and encourage outdoor recreation.

One particular area of development has been 'social prescribing'. NIEL has developed a partnership with the Healthy Living Centres Alliance. Together we have submitted a funding application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. We have also been working closely with Outdoor Recreation NI, and have produced a Social Prescribing Toolkit, which is available to NIEL Members, free of charge.



## Environmental Policy Consultations

NIEL responded to a range of policy consultations throughout the year. A comprehensive list of policy consultation responses is shown below, and a complete schedule is available on the NIEL website.

Consultation	Organisation	Submitted
Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme in England, Wales and N. Ireland	DEFRA	4th June 2021
Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging	DEFRA	4th June 2021
Written evidence to AERA Committee in regard to Climate Change Bill	AERA Committee	11th June 2021
Strategic Review of the Northern Ireland agri-food industry	DAERA	15th June 2021
Written evidence to HoL inquiry on operation of Ireland/N. Ireland protocol	House of Lords	18th June 2021
Draft Flood Risk Management Plan 2021-2027 second cycle	DfI	25th June 2021
Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland - Consultation on Policy Options	DfE	2nd July 2021
Building Forward: Consolidated Covid-19 Recovery Plan	TEO	12th July 2021
Carrier Bag Levy NI Consultation	DAERA	27th July 2021
UK Forestry Standard: Proposed Key Changes	DAERA	10th Aug 2021
Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy 2021-2040	DAERA	31st Aug 2021
bTB Eradication Strategy for Northern Ireland	DAERA	10th Sept 2021
Written evidence to AERA Committee in regard to Climate Change Bill No.2	AERA Committee	30th Sept 2021
Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment in NI	DfC	8th Oct 2021
Draft third cycle River Basin Management Plan 2021-2027	DAERA	10th Oct 2021
Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework	DAERA	19th Nov 2021
Development of NI Biodiversity Strategy to 2032	DAERA	2nd Dec 2021
Draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland	DAERA	21st Dec 2021
Reduction of Single-Use Plastic Beverage Cups and Food Containers	DAERA	14th Jan 2022
Future Agricultural Policy Proposals for Northern Ireland	DAERA	15th Feb 2022
Office for Environmental Protection draft Strategy and Enforcement Policy	OEP	22nd Mar 2022



## Strategic Aim 2: Partnership & Collaboration:

*Advance collaboration within and beyond the Environmental NGO sector*

### Task Forces & Working Groups (WGs)

We continue to encourage members to engage with Task Forces/Working Groups that are relevant to their own work areas – if you are interested in participating in any of these groups, please contact [Sean Kelly](#).

In 2021, NIEL commissioned a review of its Working Groups (WGs) and how they operate. Amongst other things, the resulting report recommended that the number of WGs be reduced but certain WGs like the Freshwater Task Force (FWTF) and agriculture WG should remain. As part of this review, all WGs were invited to review how they operated in relation to the membership and aims and objectives of the WG. Each WG was also asked to produce a workplan for the short to medium term. Given the fundamental importance of NIEL's WGs, this is a huge and really significant piece of work which is due to be completed by the end of 2022.

#### *Freshwater Task Force (FWTF)*

The NI Freshwater Taskforce (FWTF) represents a range of organisations working together to ensure that Northern Ireland preserves and improves freshwater ecosystems. The group was re-established in June 2020 with an expanded membership. There are many potential issues for the FWTF to address. The situation with our freshwater is concerning, as illustrated by the most recent data in the Water Framework Directive Statistics report (published in December 2021 by DAERA), no rivers, lakes or transitional/coastal water bodies in Northern Ireland achieved good environmental status.



### *NI Marine Task Force (NIMTF)*

NIMTF secured funding from Esmée Fairbairn for the Policy Officer post up to 2026. The NIMTF made submissions to a number of consultations including: Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) Order (NI); Expanding Ireland's Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network; a Call for Evidence on Plan to Eliminate Plastic Pollution in NI; the UK Marine Strategy Part Three; the draft Green Growth Strategy and the draft Environment Strategy for NI. NIMTF will continue to advocate for sustainable development at sea - something which will be increasingly important given the proposed expansion of NI offshore renewable energy development in the coming years. This work, alongside reviews of fisheries legislation, the marine plan and a MPA strategy also due in the next year or so will keep NIMTF busy.

### *Climate Coalition NI (CCNI)*

In 2020, the NIEL Senior Policy Officer re-established a working group on climate change, the 'Climate Coalition NI', for which NIEL acts as secretariat. CCNI advocated for NI-specific climate legislation to be introduced before the end of the 2022 Assembly mandate. NIEL is pleased to report that on 9th March 2022 the Assembly passed the [NI Climate Bill](#). This landmark achievement was the result of hard work by the coalition, particularly by the Chair and Vice Chair. The coalition's sub-groups were exceptionally effective, especially the legal experts that offered advice to the coalition. Also, a remarkable effort was made by the MLAs and parties that successfully sponsored the original Private Members Bill and who worked hard to ensure the legislation was as ambitious as possible. The focus for CCNI now turns to the implementation of the Climate Act. The value of CCNI was recognised by the UN in its 'Measuring Up' [report](#) on the SDGs when it was listed as a case study in the section on 'Partnership for the Goals'.



#ClimateBillNI



Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022

2022 CHAPTER 31

An Act to set targets for the years 2050, 2040 and 2030 for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; to provide for a system of carbon budgeting; to provide for reporting and statements against those targets and budgets; to confer power to impose climate change reporting duties on public bodies; to provide for reports and advice from the Committee on Climate Change; and for connected purposes.  
[6th June 2022]

BE IT ENACTED by being passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and assented to by Her Majesty as follows:

PART I  
Emissions Targets And Sectoral Plans  
*The emissions targets*

#### **The emissions targets for 2050**

1.—(1) The Northern Ireland departments must ensure that the net Northern Ireland emissions account for the year 2050 is at least 100% lower than the

# Climate Northern Ireland



## Climate Northern Ireland

Climate NI is led by a Steering Group composed of 22 organisations from across academia, the business sector, the community and voluntary sector, local and central government. Over the past year, Climate NI delivered a broad programme of work funded by DAERA on climate adaptation and mitigation. On climate adaptation, Climate NI built on a broad range of existing partnerships and developed exciting new collaborations. Some key outcomes included:

### *Supporting Policy Development*

Climate NI disseminated the third Climate Change Risk Assessment Evidence Report. This independent report, sectoral briefing and summary report for NI were communicated through an NI specific launch event and more than 13 presentations to public and private sector decision-makers.

### *LGCAN and NI Adapts*

Local Councils are being supported in the development of their climate adaptation plans through the NI Adapts Planning Toolkit. All but one local council is now engaged in the process, meeting the aim of the second NI Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP2). LGCAN meetings have been held with presentations from sectional experts to communicate best practice from across jurisdictions.

### *Climate Emergency Training*

As part of the new ‘Mitigation Programme’ of work, Climate NI developed and delivered a one-day Climate Emergency training course, accredited with the Carbon Literacy Project. Training has been delivered to 10 councils, including courses for staff and Elected Members. Working with BITC we co-delivered two training courses to small and medium-sized businesses.

## COP26

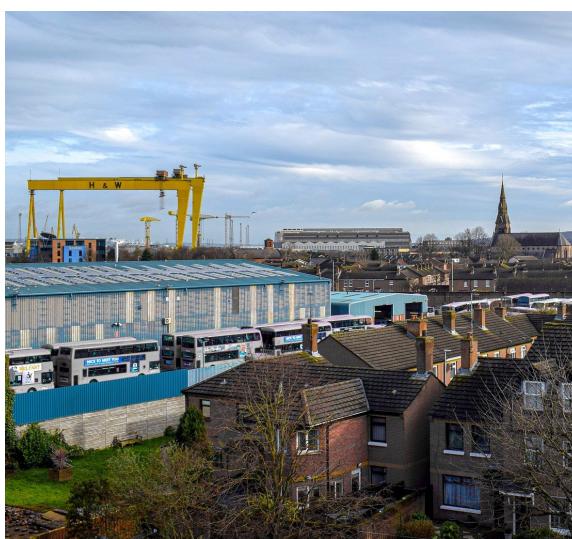
Climate NI led the 'All Together Now: Collaboration for Local Climate Action' session in the Green Zone at COP26. This event featured Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), Derry City and Strabane District Council and Belfast City Council, as well as LGCAN members. The event showcased their work on climate action and the positive activities taking place in NI. The session raised the profile of LGCAN and Northern Ireland to a global audience.

Climate NI worked in collaboration with NILGA and local councils to organise and promote Adaptation and Resilience Day in line with the COP26 President's Programme. Events were hosted in Derry City and Strabane District Council, Belfast City Council, and a collaboration between Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council. The event reached a combined audience of more than 1,000 people online and in-person.

## TalX - Transboundary Adaptation Learning Exchange

The TalX project is an Irish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funded research project that aims to establish an innovative learning network to enable a cohesive approach for measuring and acting on climate change adaptation across boundaries. The project started in March 2020. Since then, deep dive workshops have been held with stakeholders across the five jurisdictions, exploring the capabilities needed for place-based adaptation. A draft of the Capacity and Maturity Model was developed and presented to stakeholders for feedback. Climate NI hosted the full TalX Team to fine tune the model together. A no-cost extension has been agreed until December 2022 to trial the model with councils in Ireland.





## **Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) Panel**

NIEL continues to engage with local government to help advocate for the environment. The NIEL CEO is a member of [Belfast's VCSE Panel](#). The panel's aims are:

- ◆ To ensure that the sector's voices are represented as part of the community planning process
- ◆ To develop and improve cross-sectoral relationships and partnerships
- ◆ To promote effective community engagement.

The panel has developed strong links across the Council, and is now represented on all of the Community Planning Boards. The Panel held an event in November 2021, entitled 'Enabling Change: People and Communities at the heart of Community Planning - How we deliver shared prosperity and sustainability through partnership'. The Belfast Agenda is being reviewed in 2022-23, and is a valuable opportunity to move environmental issues higher within the Community Plan.

## **Planning Engagement Partnership**

Following on from NIEL's participation in the Ministerial Advisory Group on an Infrastructure Commission, we were asked to join the Department for Infrastructure's [Planning Engagement Partnership](#). The reform of the planning system in 2015-16 was partially aimed at improving community engagement with the planning system, and the PEP was tasked with reviewing how successful this process has been. The forum was made up of a range of partners from Central and Local Government, as well as universities and the voluntary sector. Feedback was through a number of participatory events and online. The Partnership produced a [report](#) detailing practical recommendations that will hopefully enhance the quality and depth of community engagement at regional and local planning authority levels, and will help to improve the planning experience for all.

### Strategic Aim 3: Membership and Capacity

*Increase the capacity and sustainability of the environmental NGO sector in NI*

#### Education for Sustainable Development

The Education for Sustainable Development Forum (ESDF) is a network that promotes a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of environmental education in NI. ESDF published 10 e-bulletins during the year, providing a range of information and updates for its members.

In the previous year we received funding from DAERA to produce a new sector-wide Strategy for Education for Sustainability. In 2021-22, much our focus was then on the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan. A range of information and awareness raising events were carried out during the year, as well as the development of a new ESDF website. We are currently working on the further development of the Strategy, including the creation of a stronger and more accessible online presence.

#### The Joint Forum

The NIEL CEO represents the environment sector on the NICVA Joint Forum, which is made up of representatives from Government and the VCSE sector. The Forum provides a mechanism to facilitate open discussion of key issues which shape the relationship between the voluntary and public sectors. It also seeks to examine and influence the impact of public policy and support opportunities for greater co-operation and joined up activity. The panel met in June and October 2021, and February 2022. During the period a number of new members joined the Forum, and a general review was carried out. A new programme is being worked through, with a focus on communications and resourcing. The relevant working groups will report in early 2023. You can find out more about the forum [here](#).



**education for  
sustainable  
development  
forum**





### Linking with the Historic Environment

Most of NIEL's work is around the natural environment, but given the breadth of the environment sector and of the NIEL membership, we maintain a strong relationship with the Historic Environment Division of the Department for Communities. Together with some member organisations, NIEL has been an important participant in the creation of an Historic Environment stakeholder group. We have been working to show how fundamental heritage is to our society - how it supports our economy, strengthens our communities and is crucial in shaping our character.



NIEL manages the sectoral website 'NI Heritage Delivers' where up-to-date information and news is posted. The NIEL CEO is a member of the Historic Environment Core Group, and was also on the Culture, Arts and Heritage Taskforce. The Taskforce met a number of times over Summer 2021, and produced a report setting out what was needed to help the sector to recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

Towards the end of the year, we submitted a funding application to the Covid Recovery Employment and Skills Initiative for Heritage. Our application was successful, and we have appointed Leah O'Neill as our Historic Environment Projects and Policy Officer.

### NIEL Funding 4 the Environment

As part of our commitment to help improve the sustainability and resilience of the Environment sector, NIEL, with the financial support of NIEA, has purchased an online funding database. The database has a very wide range of funding opportunities and is updated on a weekly basis. It is available free of charge to all NIEL members and we hope that organisations are able to maximise the benefits from it.



## Environment Links UK (ELUK)

Environment Links UK continued to work closely during the year. As well as our joint advocacy around Brexit and Environmental Governance (see page 6) we also continued to focus on the delivery of our Nature Targets programme (see page 8).

Traditionally ELUK have organised a biennial conference for the members, alternating around the 4 countries. In light of the pandemic, we decided to run an online event in 2021, with each Link taking the lead in a different subject area. The 4 events were well attended by ELUK members across the UK, covering topics including: Diversity and Access, Ocean Recovery and Nature Targets. NIEL looked at the subject of Green Finance with our partners at the Ecosystems Knowledge Network. This is an area of work that we are continuing to develop in 2022-23.

Everyone knows that Glasgow hosted the Climate COP in November 2021. It was also the venue for ELUK's biennial Chairs and Directors meeting. As well as attending some of the COP events, the members discussed a range of topics, including long term resourcing and future areas of focus for joint working.

## Urban Green Spaces Programme

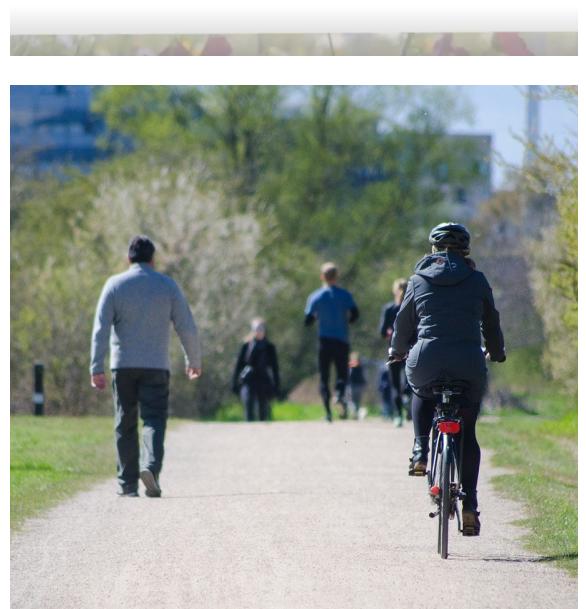
NIEL, together with National Trust, are leading a National Lottery Heritage Fund programme to research the Future of Urban Green Spaces in Northern Ireland. This one-year programme was initiated at the end of 2021-22, with the aim of gaining an understanding of the current issues and opportunities for urban green space, and setting out a long-term plan to maximise its better use. The project will include a wide range of stakeholder engagement and will consider the potential for urban green space to play a role in addressing our nature, climate and health crises.



## Could all jobs be Green Jobs?

Environment Links Online Workshop session

Questions for participants. Results will be unveiled shortly!





## Nourish NI

Nourish NI (formerly Belfast Food Network) is building, supporting and leading an emerging sustainable food movement across the country. We are the national NI partner for Sustainable Food Places, which is one of the fastest-growing social movements today. It is an alliance of cities, towns and boroughs, each of which is harnessing sustainable food as a vehicle for driving positive change.

There are five proactive sustainable food partnerships across Northern Ireland that are promoting sustainable food as a means of enabling positive social, economic and environmental benefits for our communities, businesses and planet.

Belfast, Derry City and Strabane, Ards and North Down, Mid and East Antrim, and Newry, Mourne and Down Councils are members of SFP, delivering comprehensive Programmes across all sectors of the food system. This has resulted in many local solutions being identified through collaborative working, including cooperative greengrocers, increased fresh produce available to people affected by food insecurity, new community farms and growing spaces.

We support the growth of the SFP across the country, and look forward to seeing an upswell in activity in the coming years. Our policy work has resulted in the NI Future Food Strategy Framework mirroring the six SFP themes, and increased understanding of sustainable food within government.

We delivered NI's Food, Farming and Land Convention with a strong consortium of RSPB, NIEL, FFCC (Food, Farming and Countryside Commission), Nature Friendly Farming Network and Food NI. The annual event addresses key challenges including food insecurity, climate change, nature loss and equitable access to affordable, healthy food.

## Full Members

Action Renewables  
 Balinderry Rivers Trust  
 Belfast Charitable Society  
 Belfast Civic Trust  
 Belfast Healthy Cities  
 Belfast Hills Partnership  
 British Trust for Ornithology  
 Broughshane Improvement Committee  
 Buglife  
 Business in the Community  
 Butterfly Conservation  
 Carntogher Community Association  
 Carrickfergus Community Cultivators  
 Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust  
 Cavehill Conservation Campaign  
 Chartered Institute for Archaeologists  
 Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management  
 Chartered Institute of Environmental Health  
 Colin Glen Trust  
 Community Places  
 Copeland Bird Observatory  
 Council for British Archaeology  
 Creggan Country Park  
 Development Trusts NI  
 EcoSeeds  
 Enriched Earth Ecovillage  
 Field Studies Council  
 Field Studies Ireland  
 Friends of the Earth NI  
 Glens Red Squirrel Group  
 Grass Roots Conservation Group  
 Green Foundation Ireland  
 Holywell Trust  
 Institute of Public Health in Ireland  
 Jubilee Farm  
 Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful  
 Lagan Valley Regional Park

Landscape Institute Northern Ireland  
 Leave No Trace Ireland  
 Lecale Conservation  
 Lough Erne Heritage  
 Lough Neagh Partnership  
 Mountaineering Ireland  
 Mourne Heritage Trust  
 National Trust  
 Natural Copeland  
 Nature Friendly Farming Network  
 Northern Ireland Badger Group  
 Northern Ireland Forest School Association  
 Organic Centre  
 Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland  
 Ringhaddy Area Residents  
 Royal Society for the Protection of Birds  
 Rural Community Network  
 Social Farms & Gardens  
 Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership  
 Supporting Communities NI  
 Sustainable Northern Ireland  
 Sustrans  
 The Conservation Volunteers  
 The Woodland Trust  
 True Harvest Seeds  
 Ulster Angling Federation  
 Ulster Archaeological Society  
 Ulster Federation of Rambling Clubs  
 Ulster Wildlife  
 Waste and Resources Action Programme  
 Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust



### **Associate Members (Organisations)**

Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council  
Association of Professional Game Angling Instructors  
Delamont Country Park  
EcoTourism Ireland  
Education Authority - Belfast Region  
Education Authority - South Eastern Region  
Education Authority - Southern Region  
Energy Saving Trust  
Envirocentre  
Food, Farming and Countryside Commission  
Glenhordial Permaculture Farm  
Made In Trebania  
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council  
RES UK and Ireland  
The Hermitage Cottage  
The Northern Ireland Housing Executive

### **Associate Members (Individuals)**

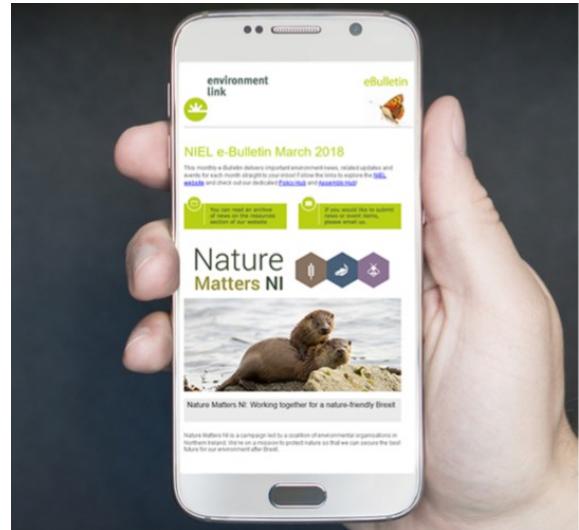
Anderson, Zoe	
Casement, Anne	O'Neill, Leah
Casement, Patrick	O'Sullivan, Philip
Christie, Peter	Orford, Julian
Christie, Sue	Robinson, Lorraine
Curry, Robin	Saunders, Jim
Foster, Bill	Stelfox, Dawson
Green, Frances	Stephens, Jude
Hernan, Robert Emmet	Williams, Brian
Heron, Alastair	Workman, Sacha
Hood, Isabel	
Irving, Tina	
Jack, Brian	
Knott, David	
McAdam, Jim	
McCabe, Stephen	
McEvoy, Stephanie	
Moorhead, Heather	
Nelson, Roy	

## Strategic Aim 4: Communications

*Communicate effectively with our members, partners, stakeholders and other target audiences.*

### *NIEL e-Bulletin*

The NIEL e-Bulletin features the latest environmental news, events, funding and job opportunities. The e-Bulletin maintains a very high open rate (49%). 10 issues were circulated in 2021-22.



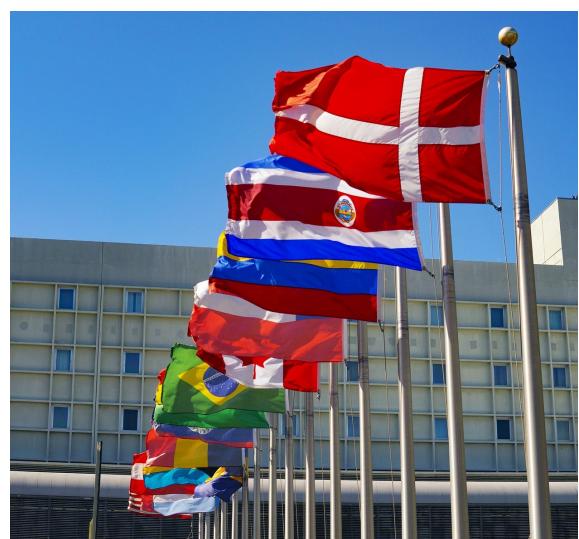
### *Social Media*

NIEL social media analytics for the 2021/2022 period showed a moderate increase in following, with the Facebook page growing from 1,790 followers to 1,920 followers (7% increase) and Twitter followers growing from 2,449 to 2,817 (15% increase). NIEL's LinkedIn company profile has grown from 391 followers to 452 followers this year (16% increase).



### *NIEL website*

Analytics continue to record interest in the NIEL website, with 29,198 visits recorded in the April 2021 - March 2022 period. 134,026 total pageviews were recorded between April 2021 - March 2022.



### *Environmental News, Research and Analysis*

In recognition of the key role that the European and other international institutions play in the development of environmental policy at the local level, NIEL continued to produce a monthly environmental news-sheet entitled Environmental News, Research and Analysis (ENRA) which provides the latest international research information and policy analysis relevant to Northern Ireland.



## New websites for NIEL, Climate NI and ESDF

In September 2021, NIEL received funding from DAERA to replace the NIEL, Climate NI and Education for Sustainable Development Forum websites. The previous websites have been in operation since 2007 and were in need of significant updates and improvements.

The new websites have a wide range of features including:

- ◆ Improved navigation – search bars and filters introduced, simplified layout throughout
- ◆ Optimisation for a broad range of devices and web browsers
- ◆ Mobile version of the site to improve experience for mobile and tablet users
- ◆ Improved Content Management System to allow for design flexibility, ease of use, reduce workload required to maintain websites
- ◆ Live social media feed.

### Staff Training

NIEL and Climate NI staff completed accredited Carbon Literacy Training in August 2021.

### Staff Changes

Alan Kennedy-Asser joined the Climate NI team as UK Climate Resilience Programmed Embedded Researcher in October 2021.

Portia Woods joined as a Policy Officer with Belfast Food Network in May 2021.

## Funding

NIEL, along with many other environmental NGOs, receive funding from NIEA's Environment Fund. We also accessed in-year funding for: activity around the 'Green Recovery' from the pandemic; we started work on delivering the new Strategy for Education for Sustainability; we continued to progress work around environment and health, setting up a working group which met several times during the year, and developing a partnership with the Healthy Living Centres Alliance. At the end of the year we submitted a joint application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a social prescribing programme. We also received funding from DAERA to progress work with the NI Protected Areas Network. Working with a consultant, we pulled together a funding application to Esmée Fairbairn for a 3-year programme to help resource and connect the NIPAN membership. Other significant funding came from DAERA for the delivery of the Climate NI programme, which continues to go from strength-to-strength. Esmée Fairbairn Foundation is our other main funder; as well as providing the annual grant they also supported our work with the Environment Links UK on Nature Targets. We are grateful to our funders for their ongoing support, and their flexible approach during the pandemic. NIEL also received funding from Sustainable Food Places and Community Foundation Ireland.

## Finances and Subscriptions

NIEL is a membership organisation and receives income from subscriptions. The organisation's budget is prepared in December and finalised at the start of the following Financial Year. Accounts are prepared for each meeting of the Finance and Human Resources Committee (FHR), which meets four times per year, in advance of the Board. The financial report is included on all Board Agendas. The end of year accounts are reviewed at the FHR closest to the AGM, and sent out in advance to all Board Members.





### **Board of Directors**

The Board of Directors met on the following dates:

- ◆ 24th June 2021
- ◆ 16th September 2021
- ◆ 2nd December 2021 (AGM)
- ◆ 23rd March 2022.

The FHR Sub Committee met on the following dates:

- ◆ 10th June 2021
- ◆ 1st September 2021
- ◆ 18th November 2021
- ◆ 3rd March 2022.

The SIM Sub Committee did not meet.

### **Risk Register**

The Risk Register is a standing item on the FHR Agenda and reviewed quarterly by the NIEL Board of Directors to ensure that emerging risks that could potentially impact on the organisation are identified and mitigation measures are agreed.

## Events

NIEL hosted, co-hosted and participated in a broad range of events throughout the year.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, many events were cancelled, postponed or hosted online.

A full list of events is available on our website – [www.nienvironmentlink.org/events](http://www.nienvironmentlink.org/events)

Event	Location	Date
ESDF Conference 2021	Online	10th March 2021
2021 Super Year for Nature and Climate	Online	11th June 2021
COP26 in NI - eNGO roundtable on collaboration	Online	17th June 2021
Open Local Government (Greater Belfast)	Online	22nd June 2021
Open Local Government (Greater Derry~Londonderry)	Online	24th June 2021
Open Local Government (South-West NI)	Online	17th August 2021
Open Local Government (North Down and Lisburn/Castlereagh)	Online	19th August 2021
Open Local Government (North-East NI)	Online	24th August 2021
Open Local Government (South-East NI)	Online	26th August 2021
Environment Links UK biennial conference	Online	31st Aug - 9th Sept 2021
Climate Coalition NI rally at Stormont	Stormont	13th Sept 2021
Climate Craic Festival 2021	Stormont	19th Sept 2021
Launch of New Vision for Sustainable Land Management in NI	Balmoral Show	22nd Sept 2021
COP26 in NI - 2nd eNGO roundtable on collaboration	Online	5th October 2021
All Together Now: Collaboration for Local Climate Action in NI	Glasgow	11th Nov 2021
Environment Fund information sessions for eNGO sector	Online	15th & 17th Nov 2021
NIEL Annual General Meeting 2021	Online	2nd December 2021
Draft Green Growth Strategy for NI - Info Session for eNGO sector	Online	13th December 2021
Tale of Two Climate Bills: The Politics of Climate Legislation	Online	23rd February 2022
Food, Farming and Land Convention 2022	Online	1st & 2nd March 2022
Impact of Covid-19 on voluntary and community sector	Online	10th March 2022
Social Prescribing Evaluation Toolkit workshop	Online	23rd March 2022

## Image Credits

### Cover page

Dark Hedges ([Pixabay](#))

### Pg. 4

Hedgehog ([Pixabay](#))

Parliament Buildings ([Pixabay](#))

### Pg. 5

Brexit ([Pixabay](#))

Justice ([Pixabay](#))

### Pg.6

zoocreative / *Hands Across the Divide* /  
[CC BY-SA 2.0 \(Wikimedia Commons\)](#)

### Pg.7

Data ([Pixabay](#))

Tree by lake ([Pixabay](#))

### Pg.8

Rocky coast ([Pixabay](#))

Red Squirrel ([Pixabay](#))

### Pg.9

Lurgan Park ([Pixabay](#))

Walking outdoors ([Pixabay](#))

### Pg.11

Collaboration (NIEL)

Hands holding seedling in a group ([iStock](#))

### Pg.14

COP26 Glasgow (Climate NI)

COP26 Glasgow2 (Climate NI)

### Pg.15

Belfast City Hall ([Pixabay](#))

VCSE Panel ([Belfast City Council](#))

Belfast Landscape ([Pixabay](#))

### Pg.16

Reading outdoors ([Pixabay](#))

### Pg.17

Greyabbey ([Pixabay](#))

Piggy bank ([Pixabay](#))

### Pg.18

Park Life ([Pixabay](#))

### Pg.19

Working together (Nourish NI)

Growing communities (Nourish NI)

### Pg.21 & Pg. 23

Bee orchid ([Pixabay](#))

### Pg.22

Smartphone ([Pixabay](#))

Social media ([Pixabay](#))

International flags ([Pixabay](#))

### Pg.24 & Pg.25

Red fox ([Pixabay](#))

Company Registration Number NI034988  
HMRC Charity Reference Number XR19598  
NI Charities Commission Reference Number NIC101074

# **Northern Ireland Environment Link**

*A private company limited by guarantee without share capital - exempt from using "limited"*

## **Summary Financial Statement for the year ended 31st March 2022**

**Northern Ireland Environment Link**

**DIRECTORS' STATEMENT  
ON THE SUMMARY FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

The director/trustees present herewith the summary financial statement of Northern Ireland Environment Link for the year ended 31st March 2022 and confirm the following:

- the summary financial statement is only a summary of information derived from the charity's annual accounts;
- the summary financial statement does not contain any additional information derived from the director / trustees' report;
- the full annual accounts, the independent auditor's report and the directors'/trustees' report can be obtained on application to Northern Ireland Environment Link;
- the annual accounts were approved by the Board on 1st December, 2022

This directors' statement was approved by the board of director/trustees on 1st December, 2022 and signed on its behalf by:

**Stephen Aston**  
Chair - Board of Directors / Trustees

**INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' STATEMENT TO THE MEMBERS  
OF NORTHERN IRELAND ENVIRONMENT LINK**

We have examined the summary financial statement of Northern Ireland Environment Link.

**Respective responsibilities of director / trustees and examiner**

The director / trustees are responsible for preparing the summary financial statement in accordance with applicable law. Our responsibility is to report to you our opinion on the consistency of the summary financial statement with the full annual accounts and Directo / Trustees' Report, and its compliance with the relevant requirements of Section 427 of the Companies Act 2006 and the regulations made thereunder. We also read the other information contained in the summary financial statement and consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the summary financial statement.

**Basis of opinion**

My examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair view' and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

**Opinion**

In my opinion the summary financial statement is consistent with the full annual accounts and director / trustees' report of Northern Ireland Environment Link for the year ended 31st March 2022 and complies with the applicable requirements of Section 427 of the Companies Act 2006, and the regulations made thereunder.

---

**Nigel V Skillen FCA**

**Diamond & Skillen**

Chartered Accountants and Registered Auditor

Sinclair House

89/101 Royal Avenue

Belfast

BT1 1FE

1st December, 2022

Northern Ireland Environment Link

**Statement of Financial Activities  
for the year ended 31st March 2022**

	General Funds (unrestricted) £	Restricted funds £	Totals 2022 £	Totals 2021 £
<b>Income</b>				
<i>from donations and legacies</i>				
• Donations	-	-	<b>0</b>	-
• Subscriptions	965	-	<b>965</b>	3,715
• Grants	483,492	15,580	<b>499,072</b>	455,108
<i>from charitable activities</i>				
• Event and project income	-	-	<b>0</b>	4,761
• Members servicing and accommodation	2,167	-	<b>2,167</b>	10,004
<i>from other activities</i>				
• Sundry income	103,003	18,065	<b>121,068</b>	153,866
• Other servicing and accommodation	1,963	-	<b>1,963</b>	-
<i>from investments</i>				
• Investment income	660	-	<b>660</b>	604
<b>Total income</b>	<b>592,250</b>	<b>33,645</b>	<b>625,895</b>	<b>628,058</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>				
<i>on raising funds</i>				
• Advertising / PR costs	450	-	<b>450</b>	-
<i>on charitable activities</i>				
• Employee costs and expenses	434,517	32,359	<b>466,876</b>	407,302
• Premises costs	23,312	670	<b>23,982</b>	21,365
• Travel & training costs	2,780	80	<b>2,860</b>	1,048
• Administration costs	10,461	120	<b>10,581</b>	15,340
• Programme / event costs	91,231	-	<b>91,231</b>	155,695
<i>on other items</i>				
• Legal and professional fees	3,370	-	<b>3,370</b>	3,165
• Other expenses	592	-	<b>592</b>	326
• Depreciation of assets	-	-	<b>0</b>	-
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>566,713</b>	<b>33,229</b>	<b>599,942</b>	<b>604,241</b>
<b>Net income for the year</b>	<b>25,537</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>25,953</b>	<b>23,817</b>
<i>Transfers</i>				
• Gross transfers between funds	-	-	<b>0</b>	-
<b>Net movement in funds for the year</b>	<b>25,537</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>25,953</b>	<b>23,817</b>
<i>Reconciliation of funds</i>				
• Fund balances b/fwd at 1st April	352,402	(4,457)	<b>347,945</b>	324,128
<b>Fund balances c/fwd at 31st March</b>	<b>377,939</b>	<b>(4,041)</b>	<b>373,898</b>	<b>347,945</b>

All of the above results are derived from continuing activities.

All gains and losses in the year are included above.

**Northern Ireland Environment Link**

**Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet)**  
**as at 31st March 2022**

	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>
	£	£
<b>Non Current Assets</b>		
• Tangible assets	-	-
<b>Current Assets</b>		
• Receivables	192,801	146,430
• Cash and cash equivalents	<u>213,626</u>	<u>238,711</u>
	<b>406,427</b>	<b>385,141</b>
<b>Payables: amounts falling due within one year</b>	<b>(32,529)</b>	<b>(37,196)</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>373,898</b>	<b>347,945</b>
<b>Accumulated funds</b>		
<i>Unrestricted income funds:</i>		
• General funds	377,941	352,402
• Other funds	-	-
	<b>377,941</b>	<b>352,402</b>
<i>Restricted income funds:</i>		
• HLF Catalyst Fund	-	-
• Open Government Network Pioneer Fund	-	-
• Interreg Fund	-	-
• TalX Fund	(4,023)	(3,997)
• NIOGN Lottery Fund	(30)	(470)
• Other projects	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>
<b>Total funds</b>	<b>373,898</b>	<b>347,945</b>

The summary financial statement was approved by the Board of Directors on 1st December, 2022 and signed on their behalf by:

-----  
**Stephen Aston**  
Chairman of Director / Trustees

-----  
**Murray Watt**  
Director/Trustee, Hon Treasurer



Northern Ireland Environment Link  
89 Loopland Drive  
Belfast  
BT6 9DW

*Northern Ireland Environment Link is funded by*



Northern Ireland  
Environment  
Agency



An Agency within the Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**  
[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

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**Heritage  
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The Community Foundation



**The Community  
Foundation for Ireland**