

Sustainable development is a valuable concept because it recognises the links between social, economic and environmental concerns. To achieve sustainability, we need to sustain our economy, protect our environment, and achieve our social goals. It is about balancing all of these needs, not trading one for the other. Sustainable development has been a common phrase within local government since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, nearly 20 years. However, it was not until May 2006 that councils received more clarity over their role via the introduction of a Sustainable Development Strategy and a new Duty for Sustainable Development. However, lack of guidance from OFMDFM has meant that councils were unclear as to their role. Now we have an opportunity to correct this and recognise the important role of local government will have to play in the new Strategy for Sustainable Development and subsequent Implementation Plan if Northern Ireland is to develop as an economically prosperous, socially equitable and environmentally affluent place to live and work.

The draft Sustainable Development Strategy is available at:

<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/economic-policy/economic-policy-sustainable-development/sustainable-development-strategy-public-consultation.htm>

The draft Sustainable Development Strategy sets out the Executive's vision for a peaceful, fair, prosperous and sustainable society and aims to identify and develop actions that will improve the quality of life for ourselves and future generations. The format of the consultation is to respond to a number of set questions on the draft Strategy. One of the questions allows you to comment on any other issues you have with the Strategy. This is our opportunity to have a workable Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy where *'Everyone IS Involved'*.

***Please send all hard copy replies to:***

*Sustainable Development Unit*

*A5.07*

*Castle Buildings*

*Stormont Estate*

*Belfast BT4 3SR*

Telephone 028 90528378 or e-mail your comments to [everyones.involved@ofmdfmi.gov.uk](mailto:everyones.involved@ofmdfmi.gov.uk)

**Please ensure responses are received by the closing date of 15<sup>th</sup> January 2010.**

Sustainable Northern Ireland would encourage you to respond to this consultation to ensure that local government is adequately recognised as a key delivery agent of the Strategy. SNI has put together some points to help you develop your response.

### ***Contents of Briefing Note***

***Page 1 – Introduction to the draft Sustainable Development Strategy***

***Page 2/3 – Points to consider in your consultation response***

***Page 4 – Key Recommendations for the new SD Strategy***

***This briefing note is available to download from [www.sustainableni.org/publications](http://www.sustainableni.org/publications)***

*Local governments are elected to represent their local communities; to be a responsible and accountable sphere of democratic governance; to be a focus for community identity and civic spirit; to provide appropriate services to meet community needs in an effective and efficient manner; and to facilitate and coordinate local efforts and resources in pursuit of community goals. Local government is increasingly becoming responsible for the well-being of local communities and for this reason its structure must be built with the principles of sustainable development at its core. Local government must be an integral element of the new Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland.*

### Northern Ireland's future will be shaped by:

1. Depletion of natural resources (fossil fuels, freshwater, biological diversity, and cropland),
2. Atmospheric changes leading to climate change and its many impacts,
3. Rising unemployment with less potential of new incoming investment, and
4. Increased poverty and economic disparity resulting in a more marginalised, less coherent society.

**A well thought out and effectively delivered Sustainable Development Strategy will help alleviate, mitigate and create opportunities while addressing these threats.**

### A new Sustainable Development Strategy must:

5. Provide an **overarching framework** for all other government strategies, policies and action.
6. Contain some **high level targets** (e.g. on greenhouse gas emissions, resource efficiency, social equity, economic progress/prosperity).
7. Enable progress to be measured and **provide key drivers** for all government action.
8. **Be inclusive** and recognise that all sectors are needed to make Northern Ireland sustainable, socially equitable and economically prosperous.

### The new Sustainable Development Strategy should:

9. Enable Northern Ireland to **take a lead** in developing techniques, technology and process, transforming its international image.
10. Use programmes like the **Green New Deal** to bring immediate and lasting environmental, social and economic benefits.
11. Build on the work of the previous Strategy and include **high level actions and targets** related to what can be achieved by other sectors.
12. Recognise, utilise and value the **expertise and progress of other sectors** in addressing the issues.
13. Enable other sectors to develop complementary action, **support innovation** and involve the wider community in implementation of the Strategy.
14. **Provide links** between all sectors to clarify how short, medium and long term goals relating to poverty, climate change and consumption are going to be addressed and by whom.
15. Have the same **priority areas for action** as identified by the EU and UK Strategies.
16. **Contain actions and targets** to address the most pressing issues that will affect Northern Ireland's future.

### The draft Strategy does not address the main threats to NI's Future as:

17. It is a **'top down'** central government focused Strategy which misses the objective of integrating sustainability actions.
18. It does not include **other sectors** or make other departments or sectors accountable for any action.
19. The Strategic Objectives are **vague and aspirational**, with key words such as 'improving' and 'promoting' making it difficult to assess progress or identify whether specific actions are happening.
20. It is **reactionary rather than being proactive** in terms of driving innovation.
21. The priority areas within the draft document **do not match the priority areas** within the original Strategy, the UK Strategy and the EU Strategy.
22. It contains **no commitments** to address consumption, governance or education.

### The Strategy must involve everyone by:

23. Providing the mechanism for **working across sectors and Departments**.
24. Building on previous action by **establishing financial and legislative drivers** to support business action and rolling out successful pilot projects.
25. **Involving businesses** with considerable experience in increasing the sustainability of their organisation.
26. **Defining the role of local government** (and others) by strengthening the Duty and bringing in new powers of Community Planning and Well-being.

### The Programme for Government:

27. Must be **written to help the SDS** create a sustainable economy that decreases poverty, increases job opportunities and increase social cohesion.
28. Should be the **mechanism used to deliver the Strategy** and be renewed every three years with specific actions and targets for that period.

### The role of the Assembly should be to:

29. Provide **political leadership** and understanding to give the Strategy high priority.
30. Facilitate **capacity building** at all levels of government, including providing clear guidance on the Duty for Sustainable Development.
31. **Set statutory targets** to ensure central and local government accord sufficient priority for effective delivery and progress.
32. **Enforce** mechanisms of accountability both to and within government.
33. **Agree an effective, functional and valued Strategy**.

The Vision of the Sustainable Development Strategy must include living within environmental limits and using a fair and proportionate share of the Earth's natural resources while achieving social goals and a vibrant low carbon economy.

Delivery mechanisms for the Sustainable Development Strategy must include:

**Education and public awareness** – of the need for action, of the reasons for action and of the specific action required.

**Financial drivers** – to support and encourage change which make it financially advantageous to 'do the right thing', including both 'carrots' (tax breaks, grants, lower prices) and 'sticks' (taxes, charges, fines).

**Legislation and regulation** – to support changes in the required direction through stricter standards, requirements and enforcement (building standards, speed limits, waste management, site protection).

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The new Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) **must address** the most pressing issues that will affect Northern Ireland in the future: increased **poverty** and **social deprivation**, increased **unemployment**, a rapidly **changing climate** and the **depletion of natural resources**.
2. The new SDS must **provide a framework** that sits over all other government (Executive, central and local) strategies, policies and actions.
3. The new SDS must **contain high level targets** that commit the Northern Ireland Executive to reduce **greenhouse gas emissions**, improve **resource efficiency**, ensure **social equality**, address sustainable **economic prosperity** and reduce our **ecological footprint**.
4. The new SDS should embrace programmes such as the **Green New Deal** to stimulate the economy by embracing green technologies and using our skilled engineering sector and workforce full of potential-through research, development, application and export.
5. The new SDS should **build on existing projects** started during the time period of the previous Strategy and undertake a roll out of successful pilot projects.
6. The new SDS should **recognise the progress and expertise** that exist in **other sectors** including the **business sector, local government** and **communities**.
7. The new SDS must **strengthen** the **Duty for Sustainable Development** as well as setting in place the necessary mechanism to provide additional guidance.
8. The new SDS should be **fully endorsed by the Northern Ireland Executive** and **Assembly** with each **Minister** and **Department** committed to their role and responsibility.
9. The new SDS must be **measurable** and its impact publically **reported**.

This briefing paper has been prepared by Sustainable Northern Ireland.  
89 Loopland Drive, BELFAST, BT6 9DW. Phone: 028 9050 7850 or Web: [www.sustainableni.org](http://www.sustainableni.org)

Sustainable Northern Ireland is funded by Esmée Fairbairn foundation, Belfast City Council, Southern Group Environmental Health Group, Western group Environmental Health Services, Eastern Group Environmental Health Committee and Northern Group Systems.