

Sustainable Northern Ireland

Annual Report

April 2005 - March 2006

The financial year 2005 – 2006 saw great changes at Sustainable Northern Ireland with the organisation emerging with a strong foundation for the future. Financial constraints hit the organisation hard from the latter half of 2004, with major changes required in structures and functions. Due to delays in the appearance of the Sustainable Development Strategy work which had been anticipated for SNI was not forthcoming, and a staff reduction was required. At this time senior staff also decided to depart, leaving SNI without permanent staff for a period of some months from July 2005. During this time the Chairman and Treasurer took over practical management of SNI and ensured that the ongoing project (working on visioning exercises for the Castlereagh LSP) was delivered and project applications were pursued.

The Board maintained direct responsibilities for running the organisation over the year, and met monthly to monitor progress and oversee activities. It was deemed extremely important that SNI should continue with existing projects and activities and ensure their completion to a high standard. Whether new projects would be pursued was deferred during a period of uncertainty during the summer, during which time a review of the work of the organisation to date was prepared. A major review of the position of the organisation in November identified the future role and activities which SNI might adopt, and it was concluded that there was a future for the organisation and it should continue to exist. Accordingly the projects below were pursued and contracts agreed. An application to the DoE and the Group Environmental Health Officers was successful near the end of the financial year and advertisement for a secondment for a local government officer to manage SNI for a year from early 2006-07 was approved. This Officer will look at how the organisation can move forward, obtain necessary funding and play its part in the delivery of sustainable development in Northern Ireland.

Government took great strides towards the production of a Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland during the year, with the document due out on 9 May.

Indications are that many of the concerns and suggestions of the voluntary sector have been taken on board. Although SNI was able to do relatively little directly during this financial year, this Strategy and the resulting Implementation Plan due in the autumn will obviously frame much of SNI's work over the coming years. SNI still holds a substantial sum from DoE for delivery of training on SD to civil servants and looks forward to completing this work in the next year.

A major issue for SNI involved the lease for the premises, which was resolved by Northern Ireland Environment Link agreeing to take over the lease from July. This addressed SNI's financial obligations while solving NIEL's accommodation problems, and was a benefit for all. NIEL also agreed to take on administrative duties for SNI on a 'cost' basis. At the end of the 2005-06 financial year the SNI accounts showed a slight surplus on the year of approximately £6,000.

There were four major projects worked on during the year; the Castlereagh LSP Community Visioning Project, the Better Belfast 'Faith Waste' and 'Swap Shop' projects and the beginning phases of the Community Waste Innovation Fund's Waste Prevention project.

Castlereagh Community Visioning – Castlereagh LSP. This project identified and worked with five communities in the Castlereagh Borough to identify what they felt were the most pressing issues in their communities and helped them to carry out some projects and prepare action plans. The communities of Ballybeen, Moneyrea, Cregagh, Belvoir and Dundonald Village were involved in the process. Work on the initial phase finished in December with the publication of the Action Plans for each community and a document summarising the overall project, but the funders offered an extension to the project to the end of June 2006 to allow SNI to continue to work with the groups and statutory agencies to develop their projects and begin to implement their 'visions'.

Faith Waste – Better Belfast. This project built on some work that had been carried out by SNI in 2004 and aims to involve faith communities in practical actions to address waste issues as a first step to looking at sustainability issues in a more integrated manner. The project aims to raise awareness of the many issues around waste production and disposal and to encourage faith communities to make the linkages to social issues at home and abroad, hopefully taking practical actions. The project will hold meetings to encourage involvement, produce newsletters, develop a competition and most importantly develop the contacts to encourage practical projects.

Swap Shop – Better Belfast. This project is looking at the opportunities for 'reduce and reuse' through encouraging people to see their 'waste' as a potential resource for others and to make it available to them. It is fully integrated with the Faith Waste project, and develops many of the same linkages between social responsibility and environmental protection, through the example of waste management. The prime target of this project is those who are currently involved in 'reuse', such as charity shops, and encouraging, assisting and enabling them to work together to improve the effectiveness of their message.

Waste Prevention – Community Waste Innovation Fund. This project is to carry out three regional conferences in the autumn of 2006 and to produce a document or documents that will encourage people to adopt the 'reduce, reuse' aspect of the waste message. It will integrate with the other two projects and adopt the most effective means to complement the Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy in addressing these issues.