



Minutes

Sustainable Development Forum

11 March 2026 | 10:00 am – 12:30 pm

Donegall Pass Community Centre, 25 Apsley Street, Belfast, BT7 1BL

Chair: Claire Shortt

Minutes: Amy Garbett

Attendees: Claire Shortt, Amy Garbett, Andrew Mowat, Colin Duff, Ciaran Coleman, Zara Hamilton, Grace McGurk, Olivia Dath, Brenda Roddy, Nicola Keown, Michael Hamley, Catherine Hunter, Christine Watts, Colleen Magee, Mikayla Cartwright, David Maze, Sophie Healy-Thow, Nigel McCormick

Apologies: Claire Evans, Emma Adair, Lisa Kirkwood, Jonathan Hayes, Mark McAdoo, Claire Duddy, Kelly Devlin, Paul McAteer, Michael Lavery, Kirsty Pinkerton

		Action
1	Welcome	
	Claire Shortt (CS) welcomed everyone to the meeting, a round of introductions followed. Apologies were recorded.	
2	Minutes of meeting on 10 December 2025	
	Minutes of the meeting on 10 Dec 2025 were adopted as an accurate record of the meeting. Proposed by: Brenda Roddy (BR), Seconded by: Ciaran Coleman (CC). CS noted that most actions have been completed.	
3	SNI Updates Amy Garbett (AG), Sustainable NI	
	Amy Garbett (AG-SNI) noted that SNI had a new staff member, Eoin Leonard who has joined as part of the EDATA project (Enterprise Digitalisation and Transformation Alliance). EDATA is a €6.7m cross-border initiative led by Ulster University and funded through the PEACEPLUS programme. The project supports SMEs across	

	<p>Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland to adopt digital technologies, improve productivity, and transition to more sustainable, low-carbon business practices. As part of this project, Eoin Leonard has recently joined Sustainable NI, focusing on supporting SMEs with energy efficiency and sustainability improvements.</p> <p>AG-SNI highlighted the core webinar series will be reduced to one a month for the 2026/2027 financial year. Eoin Leonard will add to the webinar series with a focus on energy efficiency. AG-SNI will circulate the full annual calendar once completed.</p> <p>A summary of bespoke training was shared with the group, with a particular interest in CMT (corporate management team) training. This is being piloted with BCC.</p> <p>AG-SNI highlighted the summary of suggested updates to the Sustainability Compass as a result of the focus group, AG-SNI will send a summary of these to the SDF.</p> <p>AG-SNI raised the idea of exploring a Regional Climate Action Scoping Study. A poll will be circulated to gauge interest in pursuing this further. CS noted BCC have a list of action to achieve net zero. It was noted that budget/actions should reflect council's overall share in a NI wide context. It was agreed central government need more involvement in this conversation.</p>	<p>Action 1: AG-SNI to circulate SNI webinar series schedule.</p> <p>Action 2: AG-SNI to circulate summary from Sustainability Compass focus group.</p> <p>Action 3: AG-SNI to circulate poll</p> <p>Action 4: CS to share BCC actions to achieve net zero</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Round Table Updates - Adaptation</p>	
	<p>All to share the latest mitigation report and actions. And once completed to share adaptation reports.</p> <p>Members noted some challenges with adaptation reporting, specifically around vague or overlapping adaptation actions. It was also noted that reporting against NICAPP actions could be challenging. It was highlighted that adaptation reports are not comparable, and more difficult to quantify in relation to emission savings.</p> <p>Similar to the mitigation reporting, the adaptation reporting varied between councils with some having CMT of full council approval prior to reporting to DEARA, while others remained in draft format until approval or review.</p> <p>Discussion on reporting cycles and DEARA publication of PBR. Most councils will continue with annual reporting to ensure the process is smooth for the 3-year formal reporting. Catherine Hunter (CH) noted that Mid and East Antrim also report internally every 2 years against the 17 SDGs.</p>	<p>Action 5: All to share their mitigation report and actions. And adaptation report when finalised.</p>

5	<p>Intensity ratios & benchmarking</p>	
	<p>Intensity ratios/benchmarking The group discussed approaches to benchmarking emissions in the context of organisational growth. It was noted that growth (e.g. development of new civic buildings) can increase absolute emissions, and therefore intensity ratios (e.g. per floor area, staff, turnover, or footfall) are required to enable more meaningful comparisons across sites such as leisure centres.</p> <p>There was agreement on the need for an intensity ratio that accounts for growth while still demonstrating emissions reductions. Colin Duff (CD) noted that Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) currently use a range of standard metrics, although identifying a single universal ratio remains challenging.</p> <p>Brenda Roddy (BR) highlighted that the SNN report utilised a variety of ratios which passed audit. AG-SNI will review the SNN report to identify units of measurement that could be used as comparable benchmarks.</p> <p>CS noted that Belfast City Council (BCC) calculates emissions by both department and building. It was emphasised that overall trends are more important than individual data points, and that a standardised ratio could support the setting of internal targets.</p> <p>Michael Hamley (MH) noted that industry-standard benchmarks are available and may support comparability. MH will circulate relevant examples.</p> <p>It was agreed that organisations will test a range of intensity ratios to determine what works best in practice, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Per resident 2. Per footfall 3. Per m² 4. Per head of population 5. Per £ (spend/turnover) <p>LCCC Energy Audits Overview Colin Duff (CD) provided an overview of LCCC’s energy audit approach and internal dashboard. This is based on an initial baseline carbon footprint assessment covering the full estate. The audit identified priority areas, required investment, payback periods, and associated CO₂e impacts.</p> <p>Examples of low-cost energy efficiency measures were highlighted, including ensuring pipework is re-insulated following maintenance works.</p> <p>CD noted that energy use is monitored and reported monthly, with breakdowns by site and department. Annual energy use and emissions are also analysed using multiple intensity ratios (e.g. per</p>	<p>Action 6: AG-SNI: to check SNN unit of measurements.</p> <p>Action 7: MH to share industry standard benchmarks.</p> <p>Action 8: CD to share energy template.</p> <p>Action 9: CD to share energy report once approved.</p>

	<p>resident, footfall, m², and population). CD will share a redacted version of the dashboard/template and will circulate the full energy report once approved.</p> <p>The group noted recent increases in fuel costs and the potential impact on Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions. This was highlighted as an important consideration for risk management.</p>	
6	Cross-council/public body targets	
	<p>The group discussed potential shared targets and priority areas for collective action.</p> <p>It was noted that solar panels could be a suitable target to adopt collectively. Installations up to 16kW do not require planning permission, making this an achievable option across organisations. It was also noted that the Northern Ireland Assembly may face greater limitations than councils in setting such targets.</p> <p>Ciaran Coleman (CC) agreed to share an “invest to save” business case for solar panels. CS will also circulate a solar report outlining capacity, costs, and payback periods. It was further noted that recent policy updates now allow for energy export to be included.</p> <p>AG-SNI will explore potential funding opportunities to support delivery of collective targets, with the Shared Island Fund identified as one potential source.</p> <p>The following draft targets were proposed, with AG-SNI to circulate a poll to gauge priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target 1: Solar panels (minimum of one 16kW installation by 2026) • Target 2: Tree planting and/or native orchards on council land • Target 3: Food procurement (to be defined, including locally sourced catering) • Target 4: Ensure all tea and coffee is Fairtrade • Target 5: Energy efficiency improvements, including LED upgrades • Target 6: Use of reusable mugs and provision of hot water dispensers for internal meetings • Target 7: Development of community gardens 	<p>Action 9: CC to share “invest to save” business case for solar energy.</p> <p>Action 10: AG-SNI to identify and circulate relevant funding opportunities to support collective targets.</p> <p>Action 11: CS to share BCC solar report (including capacity and payback information).</p> <p>Action 12: AG-SNI to circulate a poll to gauge priorities for collective targets.</p>
	Sustainable Food	

	<p>Beth Bell (BB) and Fiona Ferguson (FF) joined the latter part of the Forum to discuss sustainable food.</p> <p>It was noted that there is currently a lack of regional coordination on sustainable food, particularly following the closure of Nourish NI. The need for dedicated resources to support a coordinated regional approach was highlighted. One potential option discussed was a jointly funded model, whereby councils and public bodies would contribute towards a full-time regional coordinator post, with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) potentially providing additional or matched funding.</p> <p>It was noted that NICAP3 includes a target relating to food for 2029, highlighting the need for a long-term, strategic approach to food systems in Northern Ireland. The importance of a shared message and coordinated approach was emphasised.</p> <p>Sustainable food was recognised as a cross-cutting issue, with links to emissions (including supply chains and food waste) and alignment with Climate Action Plans (CAPs). It was also noted that food intersects with a wide range of council functions, including education, governance, circular economy, procurement, events, and community and leisure services.</p> <p>The DEFRA report on food resilience was referenced. It was noted that best practice (“gold standard”) would involve each council having a dedicated sustainable food coordinator, as seen in other parts of the UK, particularly Wales.</p> <p>While sustainable food presents a significant challenge, it was recognised as an issue that spans multiple areas including the economy, behaviour, supply chains, health outcomes, lifespan, learning ability, and culture, with a shared responsibility across sectors.</p> <p>It was agreed that sustainable food will be included as a standing item on all SDF agendas going forward. BB offered to provide three-weekly updates on developments, which will be shared with AG-SNI for circulation to the group.</p> <p>AG-SNI will include sustainable food in the next SDF poll to gauge interest in establishing a dedicated working group. It was also noted that a large National Lottery fund focused on food systems may present a potential funding opportunity, subject to interest and development of project ideas.</p>	<p>Action 13: AG-SNI to include food as a standing item for SDFs</p> <p>Action 14: AG-SNI to add food to the poll to gauge interest in regional coordination.</p>
7	AOB	
	Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 10 June 2026, 10:00 – 12:30 venue TBC	