



sustainable **NI**

Impact Report 2021/22

WHO WE ARE

Sustainable Northern Ireland is a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting and enabling sustainable development in Northern Ireland.

We help businesses, governments and individuals by providing practical solutions that put sustainability into action.

Our vision is a world where prosperity is achieved in ways that are good for people and the planet.

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INTRODUCTION

As 2021/22 draws to a close, we have much to reflect on.

This year saw the much-anticipated COP26 climate negotiations in Glasgow – branded a ‘fragile win’ by some and a rallying cry from people worldwide to combat climate breakdown before it’s too late. With a global population set to reach 10 billion people by 2050 and atmospheric carbon dioxide at record levels, world leaders agree our current consumption patterns are highly unsustainable. A green economy provides the answers to address these environmental and social challenges.

As an organisation, this year we have added two new members to our team and played an important enabling role in supporting the development of critical policies such as the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act (2022), Energy Strategy and Green Growth Strategy. We understand that sustainable development means transitioning to a green economy. With this end goal in mind, we can help do our bit to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees by promoting and educating others to act, tackling environmental pressures and enhancing economic resilience and competitiveness in the process. We believe that if designed with just transition principles in mind, the green economy can also address social inequalities. An inclusive green economy benefits businesses, towns and cities, allowing us to create an economic system where the planet and all people can thrive.

In this Impact Report, we will highlight how we have supported and accelerated this transition and spotlight our new flagship product – the Sustainability Scan - and how we're using it to support local businesses. We will reflect on both highlights from the work we completed in 2021/22 and the ongoing projects that continue to bear fruits.

IN 2021/22...

We have empowered:



2
BUSINESSES



12
PUBLIC BODIES



875
PRACTITIONERS



30
POLITICIANS

OVER THE PAST YEAR WE HAVE...

Had

9.7k

VISITORS on our
website

Supported

8

STRATEGIES in
the public sector

Garnered

1.4k+

FOLLOWERS on
social media

Delivered

25

EVENTS

Published

11

RESPONSES to policy
consultations

SHAPING THE POLICY LANDSCAPE

NET ZERO LEGISLATION

March 2022 marked a key milestone for climate action in Northern Ireland when the Assembly passed the *Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act*. Sustainable NI helped shape the Bill and garner political support through the All Party Group on Climate Action to enable successful passage through the Assembly.



CONSULTATION RESPONSES



As the political appetite for the green economy continues to grow, knowledge needs to be cultivated and shared, to ensure we make the correct policy choices to achieve net zero by 2050. This year we fed into several policies that will be critical in shaping economic development and environmental protection in Northern Ireland for the next 10 - 15 years. These were: the Green Growth Strategy, Energy Strategy, Circular Economy Strategy and Environment Strategy.

Other consultations that we responded to included:

- Strategic Planning Policy on Renewable and Low Carbon Energy
- Plan to Eliminate Plastic Pollution
- Reduction of Single-Use Plastic Beverage Cups and Food Containers
- Peatland Strategy
- Strategic Review of NI Agri-Food
- EU PEACE PLUS Programme 2021 - 2027

CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE THE CARBON FOOTPRINT OF CONSTRUCTION



In 2022 we added our name to *Retrofitfirst* – a nationwide campaign championing reuse in the built environment sector. We asked the Chancellor to cut VAT on refurbishment, repair and maintenance to 5% and Ministers to add clauses to planning guidance and building regulations that promote the reuse of existing buildings and reclaimed materials. We also requested that all publicly funded construction projects look to retrofit solutions first.

Impact: In March 2022 the Chancellor announced that homeowners installing solar panels, heat pumps and insulation will no longer pay 5 per cent VAT – they will pay zero.

DECISION-MAKERS EMPOWERED THROUGH ALL PARTY GROUP



Sustainable NI provides the secretariat for the *All Party Group on Climate Action* which met seven times this year and explored:

- Construction and Building Standards (April)
- Planning Policy for Net Zero (May)
- Circular Economy (June)
- Fossil Fuel Divestment (September)
- Energy Transition (October)
- Climate Risks & Impacts (November)
- Air Quality & Rights of Nature (January)

Meetings stopped during the Assembly election period, during which we circulated a manifesto to election candidates on policy measures that can support the economy and the environment.

IMPACT: The Department of Finance announced a new policy that will see mandatory scoring of social value within public procurement contracts and improved energy performance standards for new buildings in Northern Ireland. This had previously been promoted by Sustainable NI through our Social Value Toolkit and Sustainable Procurement Training for the Public Sector, in 2017/18.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF PUBLIC BODIES

We facilitated four meetings of the *Sustainable Development Forum* - a platform for public sector organisations to collaborate and share experience, information and good practice to advance sustainable development in Northern Ireland. Meetings were held on:

- 16 June 2021
- 22 September 2021
- 8 December 2021
- 9 March 2022

Topics ranged from tree planting to sustainable tourism and zero-carbon cooperatives. The Forum also highlighted good practices from *Ulster University* and the Ards and North Down *Sustainable Giants* project. Sustainable NI also facilitated the establishment of the *NI EV Consortium* which secured £1,348,370 for 124 residential EV charge-points across Northern Ireland.



SPOTLIGHT

BELFAST: SOCIAL VALUE PROCUREMENT POLICY

In 2017 we delivered training on sustainable procurement and produced a *Social Value Toolkit* to encourage the public sector to use its purchasing power as a force for good. Then in 2021, Belfast introduced a *Social Value Procurement Policy*, the first of its kind in Northern Ireland. The policy aims to ensure the purchase of goods, services and works helps to drive inclusive economic growth, improve the local environment, and support local communities - while ensuring the best possible value for money for the people of Belfast.

PROMOTING FOSSIL FUEL DIVESTMENT

In 2021, we added our name to the *Make My Money Matter* campaign. The campaign states that greening your pension is one of the most powerful things you can do to limit global warming and aims to shift UK pensions into sustainable investments. We wrote to the Chief Executives of Councils, NILGOSC and the NI Assembly Commission, calling on these pension schemes to commit to investing in line with the Government's ambitions to create a greener, fairer and healthier country and show leadership ahead of the COP26 climate summit. In the letter, we outlined that research has shown sustainable funds have, on average, matched or outperformed non-sustainable investments over the past decade.

IMPACT: NILGOSC has completed the transfer of £2.8bn of investments in global equities from funds that follow standard indices to the Legal & General Low Carbon Transition Fund. The fund aims to reach the goal of achieving Net Zero carbon emissions by 2050.



FERMANAGH AND OMAGH: SHAPING NORTHERN IRELAND'S FIRST COUNCIL CLIMATE PLAN

Developed in 2021, *Restore, Revive, Thrive - Our Environment* is an Action Plan that sets out the practical steps the Council will take over the coming years to minimise climate change impacts and ways in which the Council can try to counter the severity of the climate emergency. We supported the development of the plan by delivering workshops, collating input from staff and drafting the plan itself.

IMPACT: The Action Plan has now landed on the desks of the Chief Executive and Heads of Service and it has significantly elevated the significance of climate emergency work across the council. As well as bringing forward a range of new actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change, it has prompted discussion between departments to develop indicators to monitor the council's response to the climate emergency.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN: TRAINING INFORMS DECISION-MAKING ACROSS THE COUNCIL

Ards and North Down has a strong record on sustainability. The *Roadmap to Sustainability* presents routes the Council can take to ensure the Council and Borough becomes more sustainable. In September 2021, we delivered training to senior decision makers on integrating the principles of sustainability into future council plans and decisions.

IMPACT: In 2021, the Roadmap and follow-up training delivered by Sustainable NI has empowered staff to screen and adjust decisions and plans so that sustainability is taken into account. The Council is now implementing a range of sustainability initiatives including: electrification of parks equipment; a food donation scheme from Bangor Castle Walled Garden; a Green Tourism Programme; extending greenways and re-wilding the council's estate. This progress is down to the knowledge, passion and can-do attitude of staff and local volunteers in Ards and North Down.

SHARING IDEAS: RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Although it is important to raise awareness about climate breakdown, it is equally important to promote the potential solutions. Green economic policies will be required to prevent global temperatures from rising to dangerous levels. An inclusive green economy is one that improves human well-being and builds social equity while reducing environmental risks and resource scarcities. All sectors of the economy have a role to play and

can benefit from the green economy. Socrates the Greek philosopher said, 'to know the good is to do the good'. When people fully understand the problem and potential solutions, they feel empowered to act. We believe knowledge sharing and awareness raising are powerful tools in promoting change at scale and we continue to prioritise this, highlighting best practices, research and innovation through our website, newsletter and events.

SPOTLIGHT

CASE STUDY: ERNE CAMPUS

This year we published **five case studies** highlighting exemplary sustainability practices from across the voluntary, public and private sectors. From *community fridges* to *sustainable business districts*, case studies help ignite imaginations and encourage others to replicate the ideas.

One of the case studies published on our website is the award-winning Erne Campus - a *Passivhaus Premium Building* which has been viewed over 800 times since first published. The further education building officially opened last year, replacing the existing campus constructed in 1971. The Enniskillen campus is the first educational building worldwide to achieve the highest international standard in environmental construction, known as *Passivhaus Premium*.

It is also the first *Passivhaus Premium* project in the UK and won the Public Sector Project Design Stage Award at the prestigious BREEAM Awards in 2021. *Passivhaus* features include:

- Thermal envelope
- Airtightness
- Mechanical heat recovery ventilation
- Subsoil heat exchange
- Biofuel micro-CHP
- Heat pump
- Solar PV
- Battery storage

IMPACT: The South West College building represents an excellent demonstration of how to successfully implement a cost-effective nearly zero-energy building (nZEB) using a combination of passive-house design principles and on-site renewable energy.



November 2021: Panel Discussion at Armagh Planetarium

DEMYSTIFYING SUSTAINABILITY: PROMOTING PRACTICAL ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

In 2021 we took advantage of COP26 and the focus given to environmental issues in the media, government and industry to help us advance our mission and raise awareness about climate change solutions. We did this by publishing several articles and taking part in events organised in parallel to the climate negotiations in Glasgow.

In total, we authored **9 articles** in 2021/22 each with the aim of demystifying sustainability and promoting sustainable policy-making and individual action. Articles included:

- Green recovery from Covid-19
- Pension divestment
- Youth climate activism
- Role of gas in the energy transition
- Top tips for individual climate action
- Hydrogen as an energy carrier
- Green credentials of natural gas
- Climate crisis in the context of war

We spoke at **10 events** over the course of 2021/22. Highlights included:

- Climate Change Roundtable hosted by the Minister for Infrastructure
- Armagh Planetarium COP26 Panel Event
- Radio Ulster interview on becoming a green consumer
- RTPI Planning and Climate Change Event
- Imagine Festival - Role of Climate Assemblies
- UK Government Net Zero Webinar for SMEs

IMPACT: Whilst the events involved a range of different audiences, from Ministers to SMEs, each provided a unique opportunity to promote our organisation and its mission. We championed the idea that change starts with the individual, and that small changes make a big difference. The Radio Ulster interview provided the largest reach, with an audience of 500,000+ people. Next, in terms of impact, was the UK Government's Net Zero Webinar which was attended by 80+ businesses from across Northern Ireland. The webinar provided insights into the challenges faced by businesses and triggered the development of our Green Business Support Programme which we are now trialling with local businesses.

A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS REVOLUTION: MAKING VALUE CHAINS GREENER

Sustainability is not just common sense from an environmental and social perspective — it also makes good business sense. The green economy brings businesses many competitive advantages, including leading the innovation curve, opening up new markets, improving customer relations and increasing brand value. Our Sustainability Scan takes a holistic approach in analysing and measuring

sustainability in a company's day-to-day operations and its overall business model. It identifies opportunities to rethink and improve upon product and service design, operations and business models to maximise social and environmental impact. To date, we have used the tool to support two businesses — a social enterprise and a large corporation, and have developed a Green Business Support Service centred around the tool.

SPOTLIGHT

OMAGH ENTERPRISE

Our Sustainability Audit Matrix (SAM) - a tool used to assess the sustainability of local authorities - was transformed into an accessible industry-facing tool this year: the Sustainability Scan. Through a combination of data analysis and on-site inspection, it provides rich insights into a company's environmental management practices including its impact on air quality, climate, water, land and biodiversity - and when applicable the impact of its supply chain and distribution channels. It also evaluates social impacts: the extent to which companies look after their customers, invest in staff and whether they support the

community in which they operate as well as overall engagement around social/ environmental impact, ethics, and transparency. We were commissioned by Omagh Enterprise, a business development hub in Co.Tyrone, to undertake a sustainability scan of the business. They received a baseline report with a prioritised list of actions to improve the sustainability of the business and reduce costs.

IMPACT: Omagh Enterprise was delighted with the report, as it provided a baseline to improve on and measure progress against. We will follow up in 12 months to evaluate the impact of the recommendations.



ORIGINAL BUSINESS MODEL

NEW SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

Example of a sustainable business model: Michelin tyres

SWITCHING GEAR: PROMOTING AWARENESS OF SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODELS IN RETAIL

At the end of March, we were invited to attend the *Northern Ireland Retail Consortium's* annual conference, to discuss opportunities for enhancing sustainability in retail outlets. Held in Hillsborough Castle, the event was attended by all of the major shopping malls across Northern Ireland as well as their supply chain partners. Sustainable NI's talk was preceded by a stark warning from Danske Bank's Chief Economist about economic challenges and the knock-on impact they will have on consumer spending as a result of the war in Ukraine, global volatility in food and energy prices and high levels of inflation.

We used this platform to highlight the economic benefits of sustainability stemming from resource efficiency and smart energy management. We profiled shopping centres that have already adopted sustainable practices and the benefits they have realised from doing so.

IMPACT: Two retail outlets engaged Sustainable NI to support them in developing sustainable business plans. We have completed a Sustainability Scan of The Boulevard, an out-of-town shopping outlet close to Banbridge, which was happy with the support as it has informed its sustainability policy and plans to make immediate energy efficiency improvements to satisfy investor demand for improved ESG performance. A second retail centre will receive support and guidance in 2022/23.

LOOKING AHEAD: SUPPORTING NET ZERO BY 2050

To achieve our shared goal of net zero carbon emissions by 2050 we must accelerate the adoption of green strategies across businesses, cities and civil society, using a practical and data-driven approach. High-level policy change must also be enacted to create the enabling conditions for a green economy. At Sustainable NI, we aim to do this by forming partnerships that unite key stakeholders across localities and industries, forming data-driven tools, support services and platforms to stimulate the adoption of green practices at scale and speed, and applying a social lens to ensure the transition is fair.



1. FORM PARTNERSHIPS FOR SCALING A GREEN ECONOMY

The green economy is an intrinsically multi-stakeholder model that necessitates cross-sector and cross-boundary engagement. No one entity can address the challenges of climate breakdown, resource scarcity and social inequities alone. Instead, radical collaboration is needed. Sustainable NI is committed to partnering with stakeholders across the board to strengthen the evidence base for the low-carbon transition and build knowledge of the links between the green economy and social issues and on tracking overall sustainability performance.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FORUM

Our public sector forum meets four times a year to discuss sustainability and net zero policy and delivery. Its goal is to achieve shared understanding and improved coordination across local government and the wider public sector. Meetings consider how actions at national, local and community levels fit together. Providing resources, building local capacity and capability, and identifying opportunities for collaboration are also key priorities of the group.

Learn more about the [Forum](#).

Circular Economy Coalition

Sustainable NI is part of a government-led coalition that aims to facilitate broad stakeholder engagement with the circular economy transition in Northern Ireland. A key role of the coalition is to support and feed into the development of a Circular Economy Strategy which will complement and align with the Government's 10x Economic Vision, Energy Strategy, Skills Strategy and Green Growth Strategy.

Learn more about the [Circular Economy Coalition](#).

Northern Ireland Electric Vehicle Consortium

A consortium of all eleven councils — including Sustainable NI — that are working together to submit a joint application to the On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS). The £20m fund is aimed at improving charging options for people who live on terraced streets or in flats. The coalition, led by Derry City and Strabane District Council, meets regularly to navigate barriers to Northern Ireland councils applying to the fund, including confusion over responsibility for footpaths and provision of charging infrastructure generally.

Learn more about the [Electric Vehicle Consortium](#).

2. DEVELOP FLAGSHIP PRODUCTS

Digital tools can scale sustainability impact. They enable users to understand current net zero developments, scan for relevant opportunities and act accordingly. Data is equally crucial and underpins evidence-based decision- and policy-making. We will look to develop digital products and platforms that focus on bringing this evidence and guidance to businesses, towns and cities in 2022/23 and beyond. Exciting digital products to keep an eye on:

Resource hub

An open-access, online library of case studies and resources designed to inspire local place-based climate action as well as corporate sustainability initiatives.

Sustainability Decision Tool

By the end of 2023, we aim to have a new web-based decision tool that offers public sector decision-makers high-level insights about the sustainability of proposed projects. It will generate a simple visual of the main environmental and social impacts of any given decision and suggest interventions to improve the sustainability of the project or investment.

3. LOOK AFTER OUR STAFF

We will prioritise staff wellbeing as we know that our workforce is our primary asset. Sustainable NI will review its policies and procedures to ensure it continues to be a vibrant and rewarding place to work, offering competitive wages, wellbeing provisions, training, flexible working and generous benefits that ensure our staff enjoy a healthy work-life balance.

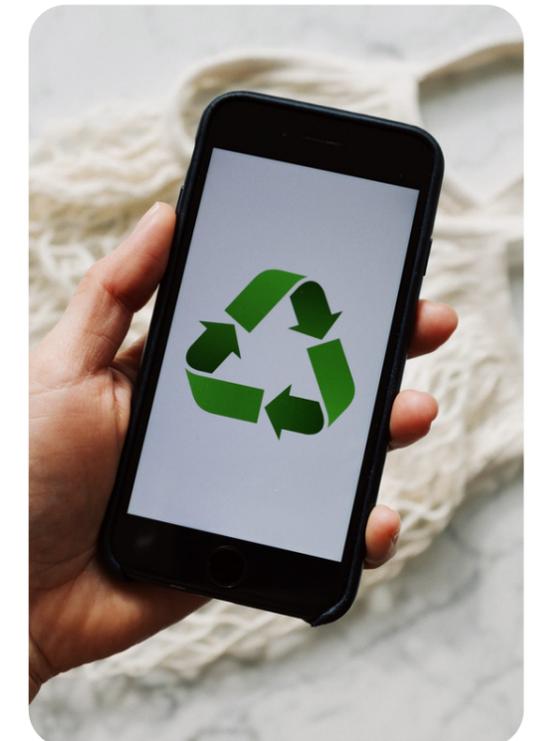
4. PROMOTE WHAT WE DO

We will communicate our work through a variety of channels and look to engage new audiences and potential funders. We'll develop marketing collateral for our business support service and attend key stakeholder events to share our ideas with others and form new partnerships.

Website

Our website will have a refresh in 2022/23 and adopt our new branding. It will be a call to action, encouraging organisations to work with us as partners, funders or clients. It will feature a resource hub for ease of sharing guidance and good practice and explain to members of the public how they can lead a more sustainable life.

Learn more about our current [website](#).



TESTIMONIALS

We work with many partners across a range of sectors to address the planetary emergency. Here are testimonials from a few of our current clients and partners:



Sustainable NI is an invaluable resource. We use the Forum to collaborate with other public sector stakeholders committed to sustainability and connect the Council to a wider movement of change.

Debbie Caldwell, Climate Commissioner
Belfast City Council



The Forum is a valuable platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration. The Housing Executive gains valuable updates and information from Councils and other public bodies to learn how to incorporate sustainability into our work across NI.

Kelly Devlin, Environmental Lead Auditor
Northern Ireland Housing Executive



We were very happy with the work Sustainable NI did for us as it gave the organisation a baseline from which to improve and measure progress on our sustainability performance.

Nicholas O'Shiel, Chief Executive
Omagh Enterprise

OUR FUNDERS

We would like to place on record our gratitude to all the organisations and individuals who continue to support the work of the organisation. Our work would not be possible without the support of our clients and funders. Thank you.

Funders this year were:



MEET THE TEAM



NICHOLA
HUGHES



FRANCESCA
DI PALO



CLAIRE
MCVEIGH

MEET OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS



RACHAEL
SINGLETON



ALAN
MCVICKER



ANDREW
CASSELLS



AOIFE
FOLEY



KEITH
PATTERSON



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