

Minutes

All Party Group on Climate Action

30 April 2021 | 10:00 am – 12:30 pm
at Virtual

Members in attendance: Rachel Woods MLA (Chair), Pat Catney MLA, Kellie Armstrong MLA, Cllr Terry Andrews, Cllr Donal McPeake, Cllr Eddie Thompson, Cllr Michael Henderson, Cllr Máire Ní Dhuarcáin, Cllr Roisin Lynch, Cllr Robert Irvine, Cllr Siobhan Currie, Cllr Simon Lee, Cllr Martin Gregg

In attendance: Allan Rainey, Andrew Abraham, Andrew Dadley, Andy Frew, Anne Ford, Anne Hardy, Barry Mc Carron, Ben James, Billy Black, Caroline Best, Catherine Hunter, Charlotte Daly, Charlotte Dunlop, Chris Jordan, Christine Watts, Ciara Burch, Ciarán Fox, Colin Duff, David Cowdrey, David Glenn, David Morrow, David Polley, Debbie Huey, Declan Allison, Donna K, Kyle Drew, Elaine McManus, Fiona McCausland, Gavin Shivers, Gregory Young, Ian Montgomery, Ian Gordon, Jack Wilkinson-Dix, Jamie Cunningham, Jamie Miller, Janet Diffin, Jilly Mowbray, Jim Mairs, Joanne Benison, John Barry, John Burke, John McVeigh, Johnny Stewart, Joseph Ireland, Joseph Kilroy, Karen Arbuckle, Kerry Watton, Leo Strawbridge, Leona Maginn, Margaret McMahan, Mark McCleery, Mark McLaughlin, Clare McKeown, Michelle Harkness, Michelle Walker, Nichola Hughes, Noeleen Farry, Pat Catney, Patricia Stewart, Patrick Thompson, Raymond Gormley, Richard McLernon, Rob Macintosh, Robert Clements, Rodney Irvine, Ryan White, Seb Laan Iomas, Stephen Daye, Stephen Dunlop, Stephen Montgomery, Steven Agnew, Tom Woolley, Yvonne Zellmann, Yvonne Curran

Attendees: 86

Apologies: John Blair MLA, Claire Sugden MLA, Cllr Billy Webb, Karen Smyth, Neale Blair

1	Opening Remarks
	Rachel Woods MLA (RW), Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and extended her thanks to the speakers from Architects for Climate Action, the Department of Finance and the Department for Communities for joining the meeting.
1.1	Apologies
	Apologies were recorded.
1.2	Chair's Business
	RW provided an update on activities since the previous meeting, noting that all actions had been executed and correspondences had been circulated with the group. RW noted the recent devastating fires in the Mournes at the weekend and extended her thanks to the emergency services. RW noted it was Earth Day on 22 April, and that she had signed up to the pledge circulated to minimise business mileage and encouraged members of the group to continue to use video conferencing, and where travel is essential to use sustainable

	<p>modes of transport, rather than driving and flying, when the restrictions are fully removed.</p> <p>RW also noted the recent announcement by the UK government to set a 78% reduction target by 2035, noting that NI has only reduced emissions by around 20% to date.</p>
2	Meeting Admin
2.1	Minutes of meeting on 26 March 2021
	Minutes of the meeting on 26 March were approved: proposed by Pat Catney MLA, seconded by Cllr Roisin Lynch.
2.2	Actions arising
	<p>RW noted the following actions had been executed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister Poots responded to the Group’s queries about the proposed deferral of establishing an independent EPA to the next mandate, the response was circulated • Minister Dodds responded to the Group’s letter about the University of Exeter report on energy governance, the response was circulated • RW put forward an AQW on the Sustainable Development Duty enforcement gap and that response was also circulated. Sustainable NI has drafted a screening guidance to help any councils that want to do voluntary screening. The Climate Bill is an opportunity to rectify the lack of SD enforcement, but any Statutory Climate Duty must have an enforcement mechanism. • Minister Mallon (DfI) accepted our invitation to attend the meeting of the APG on 28th May on sustainable land use and NI Resource Network accepted our invitation to present at June meeting of APG
3	Presentation 1: Carbon Footprint of Construction
	<p>RW welcomed Kerry Watton from Architects for Climate Action (ACAN!). ACAN is a network of architects and built environment professionals taking action to address the twin crises of climate and ecological breakdown.</p> <p>Contact details: E: kerrywatton@hotmail.co.uk</p> <p>A detailed Q&A followed. Key points raised in the discussion were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11% world GHG emissions attributed to embodied carbon in construction • NI is behind other countries on this e.g., France introduced requirement on developers to monitor embodied carbon. London has recently adopted new policy on embodied carbon. Scandinavian countries have a strong track record • France experimented with the use of stretch targets, but it is too early to report on progress at scale • Minimal pushback from the construction industry, industry is ready and willing • There should be a requirement for monitoring of embodied carbon in specifications for all new buildings – monitoring is the first step toward management of embodied carbon • If embodied carbon specifications are built in early enough in the project design stage and if done properly, it doesn’t have to cost more. Carbon = Cost. Low carbon materials often cost less. Reducing waste also saves money. • Wider economic benefits need to be factored to decision making in other than the traditional bottom-line approach e.g., job creation, circularity of building materials, savings in landfill costs, health benefits to builders and residents from use of biomaterials • Biobased alternatives to concrete exist, e.g., ‘hempcrete’. A company in

	<p>Ballymena currently stocks and supplies biobased materials. Not available through all local building merchants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government policy needs to change to encourage demand for these materials and techniques, supply will follow. It does not require legislative change, only policy change. • Timber framed buildings require less cement, which reduces embodied carbon alongside benefits of carbon sequestration during the lifetime of the tree • The greenest building is the one that already exists. ACAN! #RetroFirst campaign to encourage retrofitting and re-instating existing buildings that may be void, before building new developments which encroach on the green belt • FE education sector in NI is bringing forward a suite of educational courses to support skills in this area e.g., SW College course on PH Ribbon tool • Opportunity to build embodied carbon requirements into Belfast Regional City Deal projects, Bangor Seafront Master Plan etc, to road test these ideas • Could focus in the short term on Public Buildings (40% of all building stock in NI), by setting as a minimum monitoring requirement for new buildings through public procurement. Long term, policy should limit embodied carbon for all permitted development. • MLAs can help lobby Westminster to cut VAT on retrofit to zero, otherwise homeowners are incentivised to build new homes instead of repairing what is already built
4a	Update: Policies for Climate Action, Department of Finance
	<p>RW welcomed John Burke (JB) from the Building Standards Branch, who delivered a presentation on progress on building regulations.</p> <p>Contact details: E: John.Burke@finance-ni.gov.uk T: 028 90257064</p> <p>A detailed Q&A followed. Key points raised in the discussion were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department didn't raise regulations in 2013/14 in line with the other devolved nations due to a lack of resource within the Department and the fact that other issues took priority (e.g., dealing with the implications of the Grenfell Fire) • Department recognises NI needs to catch up with the rest of the UK • Under the proposed phase 2 uplift of building standards, the new notional future home is likely to be heated through a heat pump led solution rather than oil or gas boilers • Financial support to complement the policy proposals isn't the remit of the Buildings Standards Branch • Department asked stakeholders to respond to Energy Strategy consultation • Reluctance in the Department to 'lead' the way on building regulations, preference to follow England due to lack of research budget and staff. No access to BRE, for example. Mistakes were made in the past (e.g., RHI) so there is nervousness about doing something different or more ambitious than the other nations. • NIBRAC is currently meeting, appointments have been overseen by the Commissioner for Public Appointments which has held recruitment up. Minutes of NIBRAC meetings are not currently published online. The Group asked for more transparency. • Suggestion from the Group that NI could look to the other devolved nations, and benefit from their research, e.g., Scotland and Wales, rather than always aligning to England as there are known flaws in the Part L proposals • Date not yet published on Phase 1 uplift because of requirements for

	comprehensive impact assessments and other issues that have cropped up. Aspiration is to publish consultation as soon as possible, so that proposed changes are brought in this mandate (by the end of 2022).
4b	Update: Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD), Department of Finance
	<p>RW invited Michael McLornan (MMcL) to provide a brief update on procurement policy and standards.</p> <p>Contact: Michael.McLornan@finance-ni.gov.uk T: 028 90816351</p> <p>Key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are several environmental considerations in Procurement Guidance Notes • PGN06/10 sustainability initiatives promote: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Social, economic, and environmentally friendly development ◦ For infrastructure projects greater than £1m, require delivery to BREEAM or CEEQUAL “Excellent” accreditation for new build and “Very Good” for refurbishment projects • This applies to all government departments and Arm’s Length Bodies (local authorities do not have to comply, but can follow government’s lead on this) • “Very Good” and “Excellent” ratings often require energy/CO₂ performance improvements that exceeds Building Regulations • DoF Procurement Board bringing forward a Social Value Policy Work Programme that will include social outcomes in respect of climate change. • Climate objectives should be addressed at Project Commissioning stage and included in business case development. Low Carbon / Net Zero Targets to be delivered through specifications, contract conditions, and contract management. • MMcL noted the group’s interest in embodied carbon monitoring and if Minister is interested in this, certainly this can be included in procurement criteria
5	Update: Policies and Programmes for Climate Action, Department for Communities
	<p>RW welcomed David Polley (DP) from the Department for Communities, who delivered a presentation on plans and progress within the department in relation to climate action, energy efficiency and fuel poverty.</p> <p>Contact details: E: david.polley@communities-ni.gov.uk</p> <p>A detailed Q&A followed. Key points raised in the discussion were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Communities is seeking to address the challenges of achieving net zero carbon, fuel poverty and our ageing population and the related impacts on the housing stock. It is working closely with other Departments, including DoF and DfE. 13% of carbon emissions come from our c. 800,000 homes. Given that around 80% of the houses that will exist in 2050 have already been built, future building standards are only one part of the puzzle. • Will review and update the Fuel Poverty Strategy in the next few years, to ensure it aligns with the Green Growth Strategy (DAERA) and Energy Strategy (DfE). DfC welcomes that the DfE Energy Strategy emphasises the need for a just transition to net zero (i.e., not to exacerbate fuel poverty) • BRE research commissioned by NIHE showed significant costs for retrofit (e.g., to upgrade all houses in NI to SAP Band B would cost £9.2 billion, with a payback period of more than 20 years per property). There is a lot of diversity in the NI housing stock in terms of age and type of houses, but also tenure,

	<p>income, house prices and potential for financing. There is a need to discuss how to incentivise and finance improvements to energy efficiency, as well as the measures available to deliver it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DfE is considering running a domestic energy efficiency pilot to test energy efficiency approaches, DfC will be working closely with them on this. In addition, as part of DfC’s Climate Change Plan, there was a proposal to secure a small fund to try some initial ideas (across DfC, not just in housing) to reduce the Department’s carbon footprint. • Private Rented Sector Bill due before the Assembly this summer, will provide the legislative basis to introduce mandatory EPCs for all homes in the PRS, so that NI can introduce similar rules as in Scotland e.g., landlords cannot rent a home that is < EPC band ‘X’ by a certain date. • Feedback from group was that taking a bottom-line approach to cost doesn’t account for tax intake and jobs created from retrofit. • David was asked if the Department had considered the use of behavioural economic models e.g., making an interest free loan available for home renovations but attach energy efficiency requirements as part of the terms of the loan – anchoring policy into consumer demand for extensions etc. • David noted that the Department opted not to run a ‘green homes’ loan scheme 10 years ago but recognise that times have changed and that didn’t preclude such a scheme being considered again in the future • The Department is currently offering grants for oil boilers and recognises this is not in line with climate targets and needs to be addressed.
6	<p>AOB</p> <p>Cllr Siobhan Currie (SC) noted Fermanagh and Omagh District Council’s intention to require consideration of sustainable drainage options for all development (not just major development) on a catchment-wide basis (not just on flood plains) constituting a shift towards flood prevention, as well as flood protection. SC noted there was no advisory or regulatory body for SuDS in Northern Ireland, and that this could be an issue for local councils.</p> <p>RW noted this and recommended raising it as an item of business at the next meeting.</p> <p>SC highlighted the fact that several councils have engaged with NILGOSC in the last year requesting divestment of local government funds from fossil fuels, but that there had been limited progress and that a strategic co-ordinated approach might be more effective.</p> <p>RW agreed to add this to the agenda of a future meeting, and to liaise with SC offline.</p>
7	<p>Summary and close</p> <p>RW summarised the action points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek representation at the next meeting on the issue of SuDS oversight in NI • Seek representation at the next meeting on council policy approaches to SuDS in respect of emerging LDPs <p>The next APG meeting will take place on Friday 28 May at 10:00am and will focus on sustainable land use.</p> <p>RW thanked members for attending. Meeting closed at 12:20.</p>