Places for People

A sustainable planning guide for councillors

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon
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Introduction

Northern Ireland is in transition to new forms of governance, service delivery and community development.

A new era has begun for local government; eleven newly created councils with a suite of additional responsibilities will aim to strengthen local governance processes and deliver more effective and responsive public services.

This system should be able to take action to meet the needs of local citizens in a more modern, accountable and efficient governance structure that will entail local planning, regeneration and economic development amongst the functions being transferred from central government.

Effectively, your council is now responsible for making decisions that will shape the future of your area. Working in partnership with other agencies, organisations and the people in your community, your council is required to deliver balanced social, economic and environmental wellbeing. It is fundamental that all future development incorporates the concept of sustainability; achieving economic prosperity whilst sensibly managing your natural and built assets and responding to the local needs of all citizens.

This handbook aims to help inform you of the key principles of sustainable development, exploring the themes that require careful consideration when making planning decisions. After outlining the diverse range of natural and built heritage assets that are unique to your council area, eleven themes are explored to demonstrate how sustainability can be achieved, using case studies from each council area to illustrate good practice.
Northern Ireland is blessed with an abundance of precious and unique natural and built heritage assets.

Our natural environment is made up of many scenic landscapes, stunning coastlines and impressive mountain ranges, all of which are home to a diverse range of habitats, wildlife and species. Our built heritage is represented in many historic places that include buildings of architectural significance, treasured monuments, heritage gardens and fascinating archaeological sites.

These heritage assets have so much to offer; they are the foundation on which our tourism industry and economy thrives, they provide plentiful opportunities for leisure and recreation, they offer high quality living environments, and they contribute to the distinct landscape character of Northern Ireland.

Throughout the region many of these sites are easily recognisable, but there are also many lesser known sites of real importance that contribute greatly to the unique beauty and qualities of our natural and built environment. It is critical that we fully appreciate these assets by ensuring that they are properly managed and maintained for both conservation and public amenity.

Most significantly, we must recognise that these are irreplaceable assets that represent the very best of Northern Ireland’s distinct heritage, culture and identity.

It is vital that our environment, economy and society work effectively together, to ensure that future planning decisions deliver balanced and sustainable solutions for environmental protection, economic prosperity and the well-being of our citizens.

Natural Heritage

The Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area contains an abundance of environmental assets. These sites are protected using various landscape designations to ensure that our natural environment retains its special characteristics, delicate ecosystems and unique biodiversity. Among these assets are the Nature Reserves at Oxford Island, Craigavon Lakes, Brackagh Bay and Portmore Lough, the Montiaghs Moss Special Area of Conservation and the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Ramsar site. The borough is wonderfully endowed with areas of real environmental importance.

There are many more valuable assets located throughout Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, including those that are not given special protection. Smaller open spaces, like Loughgall Country Park or Huntly Wood, all require similar attention so that we sensitively manage and utilise these assets to their full potential. Our unique heritage can be used for cultural, educational and leisure purposes, supporting our tourism industry and economy and enhancing the quality of life and well-being of our citizens.

Landscape designations include:
- 7 Nature Reserves
- 1 Special Protection Area
- 1 Special Area of Conservation
- 1 Ramsar site
- 18 Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Built Heritage

Our built environment has evolved over many hundreds of years to produce a rich and diverse cultural heritage. There are many elements of our historic environment – from the remains of remote ancient settlements and castles, ritual sites and tombs, and the many buildings of architectural importance in our cities, towns and villages. It is important that we give consideration to the special architectural and historical features of these sites, to maintain and enhance the distinct character and identity of our built landscape.

Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon has many such sites. Among them are more than 190 scheduled sites and monuments protected under planning policy for their historical value. In addition, there are fifteen State Care Monuments that are maintained for both public amenity and conservation. Monuments and sites in both urban and rural environments are a tangible link to our past; they hold information on how our predecessors lived. For this reason, they are fascinating places that we need to protect and cherish for future generations.

In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, these sites include:
- Navan Fort
- Armagh Franciscan Friary
- The King’s Stables
- Tynan Village Cross
- Dromore Mound
- Legananny Dolmen
- Lisnavaragh Fort
New Functions and Powers
Reform aims to create and strengthen local governance processes. Councils are now responsible for delivering effective public services, engaging with communities and managing their natural and built environmental assets.

In practice, councils will make decisions that shape the future of their area. Councils are required to work in partnership with other statutory bodies, agencies and relevant organisations to achieve sustainable and balanced social, economic and environmental development.

Planning
The responsibility for planning is now shared between councils and the Department of the Environment (DOE) (and its successor bodies). Councils are responsible for:
- Local development plans – creating a plan that sets out the future of an area by deciding what type and scale of development should be encouraged and where it should be located
- Development management and control – determining the vast majority of planning applications including pre-application discussion
- Planning enforcement – investigating alleged breaches of planning control (e.g. unauthorised development, breaches of listed building, conservation areas, hazardous substances, trees, advertisement control) and determining what action should be taken

The Department of the Environment (DOE) retains responsibility for:
- Regionally significant applications
- Planning legislation
- Regional planning policy
- Guidance for councils

Heritage
Councils will protect and enhance our built heritage:
- Management of listed buildings
- Designation and management of conservation areas

Local Economic Development
Councils have a strengthened role to support local business and enterprise:
- Encourage the formation of small and medium sized businesses
- Facilitate youth and social entrepreneurship activities
- Attract investment to stimulate economic growth, job creation and infrastructure provision

Local Tourism
Councils are responsible for tourism development:
- Tourism accommodation development
- Training and delivery of customer care schemes
- Advice on tourism policies and issues

Urban Regeneration and Community Development
From April 2016, councils will be responsible for both the physical and social development of their area:
- Area-based regeneration through Neighbourhood Renewal
- Development programmes in partnership with the voluntary and community sectors

Background
The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 provides the legislative framework for the regulation of eleven new councils and their functions.

On 1 April 2015, a selection of responsibilities was transferred from central to local government. This reform is not just about doing things differently; it is about doing things better. The integration of the new functions combined with councils’ existing roles will allow for a more productive, joined-up approach, giving councillors the powers to shape and enhance their areas for the benefit of their communities.

“A strong, dynamic local government creating communities that are vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe, sustainable and have the needs of all citizens at their core.”

Executive’s Vision
Sustainable Development

The Draft Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) clearly specifies sustainable development as one of the core principles of the reformed planning system.

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

- World Commission on Environment and Development

Put simply, sustainable development is described as being built on three equally important foundations or pillars: economy, environment and social. At its core, sustainable development promotes the idea that economic, environmental and social progress are all attainable within the limits of our earth’s natural resources.

Planning for sustainable development

Sustainable development provides a route to improved council decision making and the delivery of more effective services as a means of pursuing well-being and a better quality of life for all citizens.

At the same time, it entails thinking about the impacts of today's actions on future generations, as well as protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment by learning to live within environmental limits.

From now on, councillors on planning committees will undertake the stewardship of their areas; they will become responsible for the careful management of the natural and built environment assets within their boundaries.

The Department of the Environment has published an invaluable design guide, Living Places, which stresses the importance of understanding how your individual planning decisions can have a cumulative impact on your area; no single building should be considered in isolation from its context. Northern Ireland has too many existing developments approved with little or no design constraints, at a time when ‘any investment was good investment’; in this new era of council-led planning, the opportunity should be taken to avoid the errors of the past.

The content of the Living Places guide will be a Material Consideration in the determination of planning applications and planning appeals; its strategic advice is highly recommended.
Community Planning

Councillors now have a statutory duty of community planning. Community planning provides a framework in which councils, statutory agencies, organisations and local communities can work together to produce a tailored plan that meets the needs of their area. Community planning is:

“A process led by councils in conjunction with partners and communities to develop and implement a shared vision for their area, a long term vision which relates to all aspects of community life and which also involves working together to plan and deliver better services which make a real difference to people’s lives.”

- Northern Ireland Community Planning Foundation Programme

Community Planning Principles

- Civic and community leadership
- A focus on outcomes
- Partnership working
- Engagement and participation
- Transparency and openness
- Equality and diversity
- People centred delivery

New councils are responsible for initiating, developing and implementing community planning processes. In conjunction with other community planning partners, councils are required to produce, monitor and review a four-year community plan.

Plans should be based on objectives that meet the social, economic and environmental well-being of its citizens and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in Northern Ireland. Community planning is founded on seven key principles that will help achieve these objectives.

Each new council area will face unique choices, challenges and possibilities. It is important that councils implement effective community engagement processes, working with a wide range of stakeholders to recognise and address local issues, develop, improve and protect the built and rural environment and deliver the best services for the people who live there.
Coping with Climate Change

Northern Ireland’s current climate is characterised by relatively mild winters, cool summers and periods of more extreme weather. During the 21st century, it is projected that Northern Ireland will experience increasing average temperatures throughout the year, higher average rainfall in winter, lower average rainfall in summer, and rising sea levels.

Emission levels in Northern Ireland

Since the industrial era began, humans have had an escalating effect on the climate by adding millions of tons of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. At the regional scale, the levels of emissions have been measured over the last few decades.

- In 2012 Northern Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions represented 3.7% of the UK’s total, slightly above its share of the UK population (3%)
- Agriculture represents the largest source of emissions in Northern Ireland - 30% of the total in 2012
- Transport represents our second largest source of emissions – 20% of the total in 2012
- The energy supply (18%) and residential (15%) sectors represent the third and fourth main sources of emissions
- Overall, the latest data show a 16% drop in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 to 2012 in Northern Ireland; the UK average decrease is 26%

Threats resulting from climate change

Climate change poses a number of considerable threats for Northern Ireland:

- **Natural Environment**: Increased vulnerability of terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine environments
- **Agriculture and Forestry**: Potential decline in potato yields; Potential big risk from pests and diseases
- **Health and Well-being**: Potential increase in heat-related deaths; Potential decline in summer air quality
- **Buildings and Infrastructure**: Damage from increased flooding; Increase in number of areas affected by water shortages
- **Business**: Increased coastal and river flooding presents big risk to tourism
Land-use planning and climate change

The land-use planning system has an important role to play in mitigating and adapting to climate change and supporting the shift towards a low carbon economy. Spatial planning is critical in facilitating beneficial human behaviours, in helping to determine whether lifestyles are more or less carbon intensive. Decisions around the design and location of new developments – the core business of planning considerations – will have long term consequences for climate mitigation and adaptation.

The planning system is a key mechanism by which councils can make an important input to the delivery of the NI Executive’s objective of a “reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by at least 35% on 1990 levels by 2025.” This is an interim contribution towards the 2008 UK Climate Change Act target, which extends to Northern Ireland, to reduce emissions by 80% by 2050.

Mitigating climate change

It is clear that failing to take action to reduce the potential threats from climate change will cost considerably more than taking steps to mitigate and adapt to climate change. For example, planning authorities can help to mitigate climate change by:

• Shaping new developments, through siting, design and layout, in ways that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by minimising energy and resource requirements
• Reducing dependency on the use of private cars by encouraging active travel and the use of public transport, where it is realistic to do so
• Promoting the use of energy efficient construction and decentralised, low-carbon or renewable sources of heat and power

Adapting to climate change

Adaptation involves changing the way we do things to prepare for the inevitable effects of climate change. If we take early action and plan for adaptation, the less it is likely to cost in the long term and the region will be more fully prepared to cope with potential changes. The sorts of planning decisions that can facilitate climate change adaptation include:

• Helping to build community resilience to the impacts of extreme weather, such as flooding or extended periods of excessive heat
• Avoiding developments in areas that are likely to have increased vulnerability to the effects of climate change, such as flooding, landslips or coastal erosion
• Favour proposals that work with natural environmental processes through green infrastructure

During the planning for the development of the hospital, it was discovered that parts of the site had already experienced flooding and that other areas lay within the floodplain area in which the Rivers Agency has predicted a 1 in 100 year flood risk. The Camowen River was the main watercourse that would be affected by the construction. As a result, an analysis was undertaken to determine the flooding risk of the site and assess what solutions were available to mitigate the threat.

This project has been very successful in keeping adaptation at the forefront of its thinking. For example, a decision was made to integrate storm water attenuation into the development through the use of modular cellular storage units, a sustainable drainage systems technology, to control surface run-off. The hospital’s drainage systems were also designed to accommodate a rise in water levels as a result of climate change.
Creating a Vibrant Economy

Creating a strong and vibrant economy is essential in meeting the needs of our people and providing a better quality of life for all citizens. Whilst it is important that we strengthen the competitiveness of the Northern Ireland economy globally, it is crucial that growth and prosperity is met locally. Equally, it is fundamental that spatial planning processes and decisions consider wider economic, social and environmental issues in a balanced and sustainable way. It is possible to achieve economic growth alongside environmental protection in a socially equitable society. For example, adequate protection of our diverse and precious natural and built heritage is essential to delivering long-term economic prosperity through tourism.
Prosperity Agreements

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has introduced a new initiative, the Prosperity Agreement, a formal recognition that both the business community and the environmental regulator acknowledge the necessity of working together to solve increasingly complex economic issues, such as reducing waste and energy consumption.

The successful businesses of the 21st century are likely to be those companies that can reduce their reliance on finite materials, reduce or reuse their waste and move towards the deployment of renewable resources.

NIEA’s Prosperity Agreements will be brokered as voluntary agreements with responsible businesses that are already fully compliant with regulatory requirements and are ready to move beyond that level to harness enhanced market value from innovation and co-operation, resulting in mutually achieved environmental and heritage protection.

These two companies signed the first Prosperity Agreement with NIEA in August 2014. Under the terms of the agreement, they will meet all regulatory environmental standards and improve their performance well above the required standard by:

• Reducing their carbon emissions by 25%
• Reducing their water use and waste
• Working to influence their supply chain to improve on-farm sustainability
• Creating a local stakeholder forum for constructive discussion of key related issues

This initiative is intended to achieve regulatory compliance at lower costs, generate substantial reductions in environmental impacts, create greater transparency and access to the community, as well as producing stronger financial results for the businesses. It is a clear example of how a company can pursue its business goals in a way that is good for the environment, paving the way for many more such collaborations with the regulator in the future.

CASE STUDY

Linden Foods & Linergy

Based in Dungannon, Linden Foods is a major agri-food company, processing cattle and lamb products for a range of high street retailers. Its sister company, Linergy, uses animal by-products and fallen farm animals to produce renewable biomass fuels.

Considerations for creating a vibrant and sustainable economy:

• Investment in developing the skills and employability of our workforce
• Supporting local businesses, entrepreneurial activity and social enterprise initiatives
• Encouraging resource efficiency to gain competitive advantage, such as reducing waste and energy consumption
• Attracting appropriate investment, improving economic infrastructure and growing our private sector responsibly
• Protecting and enhancing our natural and built heritage assets to maintain and strengthen tourism potential
• Ensuring that development does not compromise landscape quality through cumulative impact
• Promoting economic development that has complementary social and environmental benefits

Additional information

• Northern Ireland Economic Strategy: www.northernireland.gov.uk
• Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: www.detini.gov.uk
• Planning NI: Planning and Economic Development: www.planningni.gov.uk
• NIEA, Linwood Foods & Linergy Prosperity Agreement: www.doeni.gov.uk/niea

The Mac, Belfast
Supporting Health and Well-being

Planning sets the context of our everyday lives; it determines our living environments, how we get to work, how easy it is for us to access jobs and services, enjoy green space and be physically active. As a result, planning also shapes our health and well-being as individuals and as a community.

Local government reform offers an important opportunity to consider health in a new way within the planning system. The benefits to be reaped are significant: healthier people; more attractive places; better transport services and safer, more cohesive and resilient communities. This can also enhance economic prosperity through creating new business opportunities and reducing demand on public services.

“The integration of planning, community planning, regeneration, local economic development and local tourism, combined with councils’ existing functions, should provide a productive joined up approach that will enhance the role of local government as a natural partner in helping to deliver health improvements and addressing health inequalities at the community level.”

Dr Michael McBride,
Chief Medical Officer, NI
(Your Health Matters, 2013)
Some links between health and the environment

- Today, our major health challenges continue to be influenced by where we live
- Obesity is one of the most important public health challenges facing us – the new Health Survey for Northern Ireland 2013/14 showed that 61% of adults were either overweight (37%) or obese (24%)
- Obesity can increase the risk of a range of health conditions including heart disease and stroke, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, breathing problems and liver dysfunction
- The term the ‘obesogenic environment’ relates to the influences that contribute towards obesity such as the environment, planning, design, transport, physical activity and food
- While individuals have responsibility for their own health and well-being, there are powerful constraints on choice, imposed by the environments in which people live

This settlement health map shows how the environment impacts upon an individual’s health and well-being. For example, a person’s health is influenced by how isolated or connected they are, the money they have to spend, the design of the local streets and the quality of their natural environment.

Planning has a direct or indirect influence on all these different layers

“A healthy community is better able to take advantage of the economic, social and environmental opportunities that are open to it.”
- Regional Development Strategy, 2035

The North West Community Gardens and Allotments Project is being delivered through a cross border partnership, led by the North West Region Cross Border Group.

This project is part funded by the European Union’s INTERREG IVA Programme to the value of £1.5 million.

The group works together to develop the North West Region and comprises Strabane District Council, Derry City Council, Limavady Borough Council, Magherafelt District Council and Donegal County Council. Strabane District Council led the implementation of this project and worked in partnership with the other councils in the region to deliver five allotment sites.

The project has delivered a comprehensive programme of cross border training involving Cook It programmes in schools across the region and a Train the Trainer Programme which reached over 50 people. In addition, an Accredited (NVQ Level 1 equivalent) four-day intensive course was organised, in which more than 500 participants learned about the tools, materials and equipment required to grow outdoor vegetables and acquired the basic skills of ground preparation for vegetables and how to use a range of techniques to maintain a vegetable crop. This has increased knowledge and awareness and has encouraged local people to take greater responsibility for their own health and well-being.

Additional Information
- Belfast Healthy Cities: [www.planning.belfasthealthycities.com](http://www.planning.belfasthealthycities.com)
- A fitter future for all: [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/obesity-prevention](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/obesity-prevention)
- Royal Town Planning Institute: [www.rtpi.org.uk](http://www.rtpi.org.uk)
- UK Healthy Cities Network: [www.healthycities.org.uk](http://www.healthycities.org.uk)
- NW Healthy Living Community Gardens and Allotments Project: [www.nwcommunitygardens.com](http://www.nwcommunitygardens.com)
Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Our natural environment is a living tapestry made up of a wide variety of valuable habitats and species. Northern Ireland currently has 41 Priority Habitats and 481 Priority Species, designated by the EU Habitats Directive. These are defined as being in decline, rare or significant in the context of the UK and Ireland. Habitats and species are part of delicate ecosystems, which include not only endangered species, but the vast array of living things that make up the natural world.

It is also important to remember that the natural environment is not confined to these designated places, plants and animals. Our unique biodiversity is present in the everyday places where we live and work. We need to appreciate and protect these irreplaceable assets, but we should also promote and enjoy all that our natural environment has to offer.
Some reasons why our natural environment is important:

• Contains many unique habitats, plants and animals
• Supports vital and delicate ecosystems
• Enhances the scenic beauty and character of our landscapes
• Provides places for recreation, leisure and tourism
• Improves our health and well-being

Adverse human activities can impact negatively on our habitats and species:

• Wetlands including the mudflats on Belfast Lough, Lough Foyle and the inter-drumlin bog area around Eskragh Lough have been negatively affected by landfill operations
• The shift from mixed to monoculture farming has resulted in biodiversity loss, including a 25% decline of the Irish hare
• Mussel beds have been damaged by fishing practices including trawling, seabed disturbance and boat moorings
• Bog land surrounding Dungonnell Reservoir has deteriorated due to overgrazing, while other activities such as peat cutting and even intended management techniques such as draining and burning, continue to threaten our bogs
• Species including the corncrake, red squirrel, curlew and lapwing have all experienced significant declines in recent years

Our natural environment is delicate and precious. It is important that we mitigate any potential threats by:

• Carefully considering future infrastructure development
• Addressing the impacts of climate change and adapting to them
• Tackling pollution from industry, agriculture and landfill
• Preventing habitat loss and controlling alien invasive species
• Providing education to discourage adverse human activities

Oxford Island is a National Nature Reserve located on the southern shores of Lough Neagh.

Developed in 1993, the reserve is an important natural environmental asset that successfully combines science-led conservation alongside public use as a recreation, education and tourism facility. The reserve is home to a range of habitats, a haven for wildlife. Visitors can experience up close the many wild mammals, birds, invertebrates and plants that can be found at the reserve.

Taking in walking trails, birdwatching hides, woodlands, ponds and meadows, there is also a full range of visitor facilities. Oxford Island is a fine example of how we can maintain and enhance our natural environment whilst promoting its enjoyment for public use.

Additional Information

• NI Environment Agency: www.doeni.gov.uk/inea
• Ulster Wildlife: www.ulsterwildlife.org
• Royal Society for the Protection of Birds: www.rspb.org.uk
• Local Nature Reserves in Northern Ireland: www.biodiversityni.com
• Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust: www.wwt.org.uk
Sustainable Communities

Living places – neighbourhoods, villages, towns, cities - are a focal point of social and economic activity and help to define our collective sense of identity. As individuals, we are drawn to such places to source a wide range of goods and services, for family reasons, to join with others in communities of interest.

However, the qualities that define places, serving the whole panoply of social, economic and environmental needs, should not be taken for granted. It is vital that we protect the attributes that make up successful communities, while seeking to address the factors that can undermine our community cohesion and prosperity.
Some considerations for creating sustainable communities

- Designing, implementing and reviewing a community planning process that achieves a shared vision for promoting the well-being of an area and improving quality of life for all citizens
- Delivering efficient services and necessary infrastructure to meet local needs
- Providing good quality homes incorporating high standards of sustainability
- Creating valued places and living environments that promote healthy lifestyles through active travel and access to open space for leisure and recreation
- Ensuring the existence of streets in place-making. Quite different from roads, streets not only act as important movement routes for traffic and people, they also serve as vital public spaces used by all, often the focus for generating a sense of community
- Protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment

“A strong, dynamic local government creating communities that are vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe, sustainable and have the needs of all citizens at their core.” - NI Executive’s Vision

The need for collaborative local councils

Successful communities can only be achieved by working together. Places are complex; there is no one department or organisation that can comprehensively manage how they are shaped. It is important that councillors, planning professionals and those responsible for the provision of a wide range of public services should work collaboratively with local communities to find ways to improve the planning, design and management of our shared places.

Community planning provides the mechanism by which this collaborative approach may be delivered. The 2014 Local Government Act emphasises the purpose of community planning to improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of a district. Such a power offers councils the opportunity to engage, excite and encourage local communities through more than a chase for low-value jobs. Effective community planning offers new possibilities to inspire community confidence, to tailor statutory provision to serve local needs, to generate greater cross-sectoral consensus and the future reconfiguration of services.

Creating Places: Achieving quality in residential developments: www.planningni.gov.uk
Community Places: www.communityplaces.info
PLACE: www.placerni.org
Skainos: www.skainos.org
Towards a Wellbeing Framework: http://tinyurl.com/mdwfnpk

The project successfully brought together public, private and community sectors to deliver a partnership approach to community development in a contested area of East Belfast. Initiated by the East Belfast Mission, Skainos has provided mixed tenure housing including a homeless shelter, a new church and community square, retail and commercial space and an education facility offered by Belfast Metropolitan College. Social economy initiatives ensure that profits are reinvested back into the community to support further social, economic and environmental regeneration.

The project incorporated environmental sustainability in its design and construction with a biomass system and solar panels to generate heat and hot water, energy efficient lighting and an innovative ventilation strategy. One façade of the building boasts Northern Ireland’s first vertical garden and a new inner street has been created, capable of hosting events to encourage the shared use of community space. This highly successful urban regeneration scheme has delivered many tangible benefits for the surrounding communities, contributing to the ongoing transformation and renewal initiatives in this area of Belfast.

Skainos is a multi-use urban regeneration scheme in inner East Belfast providing shared space for community transformation and renewal.
Our Protected Places

Northern Ireland has a large number of unique places that require special protection and management. These sites may be awarded protected status because they are areas of scenic beauty, because they contain an abundance of flora and fauna, or because they have significant geological and scientific interest.

A suite of designations implements the protection, sometimes underpinned by national and international legislation.

However, it is important to realise that not all of our valuable natural assets are inside these protected areas – there are many smaller sites within council boundaries that have significant local importance and need to be safeguarded for future generations.

These special places can often be promoted to the public for recreation and leisure activities, to assist in environmental education, and as valuable visitor attractions.
Our landscapes are protected using various designations:

**World Heritage Sites (WHS)**
The Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast is Northern Ireland’s only World Heritage Site. It is a place of globally important natural and cultural interest that requires appropriate management and protection measures.

**Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)**
Northern Ireland currently has 8 AONBs. These areas are designated to protect and enhance the qualities of each landscape and to promote their enjoyment by the public.

**Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)**
Northern Ireland currently has 57 SACs. These areas are given special protection under the European Union’s Habitats Directive to protect some of the most seriously threatened habitats and species, such as our peat bogs or the Atlantic Salmon.

**Special Protection Areas (SPAs)**
Northern Ireland currently has 15 SPAs. They are areas designated under the EU Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds. All EU member states are required to identify internationally important areas for breeding, over-wintering and migrating birds and designate them as SPAs. Here, we protect such birds as the Brent geese in Strangford Lough and the huge numbers of seabirds that breed on Rathlin’s sea-cliffs.

**Nature Reserves**
Nature reserves are areas of importance for wildlife, habitats and geology. They are reserved and managed for conservation, to provide opportunities for study or research and for their enjoyment by the public.

**Ramsar Sites**
Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar convention. Wetlands are important ecosystems for biodiversity conservation and for the well-being of human communities. There are currently 21 Ramsar sites across Northern Ireland, including Lough Foyle and Lough Neagh.

**Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs)**
ASSIs are identified as Northern Ireland’s very best wildlife and geological sites that make a considerable contribution to the conservation of our most valuable natural places. There are currently 389 ASSIs across the region, from the species-rich grassland at Ballygalley Head to the oak parkland of Florence Court.

The Giant’s Causeway Visitor Centre is an £18.5 million project which opened in July 2012. The building was designed to fit in with the landscape it serves.

Rather than distract from the ancient basalt landscape of the Giant’s Causeway, the centre balances the buildings with the environment. The design and orientation of the structure means that from the Causeway itself, the building cannot be seen at all.

The centre provides a gateway to Northern Ireland’s only World Heritage Site, rising and blending into the landscape with walls of glass, basalt columns and a sloping grass roof, with ceiling windows that pour light into a state of the art interior.

At the insistence of the National Trust, their award-winning building incorporates a suite of energy efficient technologies. The highly insulated construction employs a ground source heat pump system and additional heat recovery unit; these were installed in preference to using solar panels or wind turbines, which were specifically precluded by planning conditions. Sustainability has been at the heart of this project, reflected in its design, materials, energy, construction and management, in keeping with its role as curator of this important heritage asset.

Additional Information
- NI Environment Agency: www.doeni.gov.uk/niea
- Joint Nature Conservation Committee: jncc.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx
- Landscape Institute: www.landscapeinstitute.org
- The National Trust: www.nationaltrust.org.uk
Preserving our Historic Environment

Northern Ireland has a rich and diverse built heritage in a historic environment that includes listed buildings and monuments, archaeological sites and heritage gardens. These assets represent an important part of our past, our unique culture and identity; they must be carefully preserved, but also used as valuable recreational and educational resources.

Our built heritage, sensitively managed, offers potential social and economic benefits through tourism and leisure and can contribute to the regeneration of towns and villages throughout the region. It is crucial that we protect this cultural inheritance and pass it on to future generations.
The project has been awarded a prestigious Green Flag Award on four occasions for successfully combining historical conservation with the effective use of public parks and green space.

The site contained several important scheduled monuments; its extensive archaeological excavations revealed artefacts including a 17th century summer house, terraced walls and a grand stone stairway. Existing ruined buildings were restored to provide new facilities, such as a small museum and an education centre, creating new jobs. The gardens are connected to the nearby Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum, adding to the attractions of the historic city centre.

The Gardens’ regeneration has created a high quality green space in the heart of the city, attracting significantly increased visitor numbers and demonstrating the importance of heritage to the city’s continuing development.

Some benefits of preserving our built heritage:

- Avoiding the demolition waste that makes up a quarter of UK landfill
- Generating economic value and creating employment
- Celebrating our history, culture and identity
- Providing opportunities for recreation and tourism
- Offering high-quality living environments
- Conserving the embodied energy used to construct the buildings in the first place
- Exemplifying sustainable development in practice

Regionally significant built heritage sites:

1. Giant’s Ring
2. Hillsborough Fort
3. Carrickfergus Castle
4. Scrabo Hillfort & Tower
5. Derry City Walls
6. Dunluce Castle
7. Tullaghogue Fort
8. Enniskillen Castle
9. Navan Fort
10. Dundrum Castle
11. Antrim Round Tower

Additional Information:

- A Future for Northern Ireland’s Built Heritage: http://goo.gl/d6snBb
- Lisburn Castle Gardens: www.castlegardenslisburn.com/
- Northern Ireland Archaeology Forum: www.niaf.co.uk/
- Ulster Architectural Heritage Society: www.uahs.org.uk/
Promoting Responsible Tourism

In recent years, Northern Ireland has enjoyed some buoyant growth in tourism. Today, tourism is seen as a confident, aspiring sector that can make a significant contribution to the economic well-being of all council areas. However, the development of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination has to be undertaken sensitively, if we are to maintain its value as a vehicle for economic growth.

The industry is clear that the tourism sector should be ambitious, but there is also a need to protect the very qualities that make this region a desirable visitor destination.

Many of our principal tourism assets are rooted in our natural and built heritage; they provide an important means of connecting people with nature by providing recreational opportunities in open and green spaces. In this way, they can contribute to the improvement of physical and mental well-being, as well as the more obvious economic benefits.
Responsible Tourism

Tourism can never be completely sustainable – every industry has impacts – but it can work towards reducing its environmental footprint. The industry has adopted the idea of ‘responsible tourism’, recognising its need to minimise the negative social, environmental and economic impacts of its operations. Here, the best initiatives will seek to generate greater economic benefits for local people whilst encouraging respect between tourists and hosts; they are culturally sensitive and make a positive contribution to the environment.

Our unique landscapes and heritage provide a perfect platform for responsible tourism opportunities. For example, the Tory Bush self-catering cottages in the Shimna Valley operate on exemplary sustainability principles, arising from the owners’ conviction that they have a responsibility to operate without detriment to the environment and the community in which they are based.

Tourism Northern Ireland has developed guidance with practical hints and tips to help tourism providers ‘go green’. Small steps in a business can help make it more sustainable:

- Minimising waste
- Improving energy and water efficiency
- Increasing community engagement
- Sourcing local produce

The Mourne Foods and Films Cycle Tour offers visitors an alternative way to explore the beauty of the Mourne Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Located just outside Newcastle, the trail was designed by Enniskeen Country House Hotel and works in partnership with local food producers and providers including Abernethy Butter and Dundrum Bay Mussel fishery. Visitors can meet local food producers, sample their delicacies, and enjoy the scenic views of film locations, such as Game of Thrones.

The cycle trail is an innovative and sustainable tourism initiative that appeals to both locals and visitors alike. A shuttle bus ferries visitors to the starting point at Spelga Dam, from where the trail follows tracks inside Tollymore Forest Park before arriving in Newcastle and on to Dundrum.

With the growth of adventure tourism, this initiative combines an environmentally benign activity with demonstrated health benefits and an economic boost to local businesses – a perfect example of sustainability in action.

Key tourist destinations include:

- Belfast City and Greater Belfast
- Causeway Coast and Glens
- Derry-Londonderry
- Tyrone and Sperrins
- Fermanagh Lakelands
- Armagh
- Mourne Mountains
- Strangford Lough
- Lough Neagh and its waterways

Additional Information

- Discover Northern Ireland: www.discovernorthernireland.com/ecotourism
Encouraging Active Travel

High levels of mobility can improve everyone’s quality of life and contribute to a strong and vibrant economy. The concept of sustainable transport is embedded at the core of Northern Ireland transport policy and active travel has an important role to play in meeting the policy’s objectives. Active travel is an approach to travel and transport by physically active, human-powered modes, such as cycling and walking, as opposed to motorised ones.
Promoting active travel through good planning and the creation of more compact settlements can result in physical activity becoming a more regular part of people’s lifestyles. While it is clear that there are real health and well-being benefits from increased physical activity, it is also the case that environments planned for more active forms of travel are often cleaner, safer and more visitor-friendly. Levels of walking and cycling are directly affected by accessibility to the proximity of local services. Better connections between people, places and services, through the provision of ‘fit for purpose’ walking and cycling routes and associated public transport links, are essential to facilitating active travel.

**Benefits of Active Travel**

- **Individual level:** reduces the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, obesity and type 2 diabetes; contributes to good mental well-being and feelings of self-worth; offers financial savings from reduced car usage
- **Community level:** connects people with places and services; creates cleaner, safer and more friendly streets; environments conducive to active travel are more equitable in terms of facilitating mobility amongst all sections of society; encourages social interaction and contributes to strengthening community cohesion
- **Town level:** improves the vibrancy of town centres, opens up inviting places, supports retail, strengthens the economy and enhances the environment. For example, replacing motorised journeys with walking and cycling improves air quality

**Encouraging Active Travel**

There are over 1000 miles of National Cycle Network across Northern Ireland, many of which link to the Republic of Ireland. Our expanding network of greenways provides community facilities for walking and cycling, such as the Comber Greenway, the Belfast to Ballyshannon cycle route, the Newry Canal Towpath and the Giant’s Causeway to Benone cycle route. There are other traffic-free greenways throughout the region linked by a network of minor rural roads for touring.

This regional network of cycle routes can be complemented by sympathetic planning in every council area. The planning process can:

- Create safe, attractive and enjoyable local environments, with roads that prioritise the importance of ‘place’ over cars, thereby increasing ‘walkability’, perceptions of safety and quality of life
- Develop safer routes to schools, whenever feasible, to encourage more children to walk and cycle from home to school
- Use guidance from the National Institute for Health & Care Excellence, Sustrans, Living Streets and other organisations with tailored expertise in the promotion of walking and cycling
- Draw on the experience of existing successful schemes, such as the UK Cycling Demonstration Towns programme

**Additional Information**

- The Active Travel Strategy: [http://goo.gl/SjyyOc](http://goo.gl/SjyyOc)
- NICE: Local measures to promote walking and cycling: [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph41](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph41)
- Northern Ireland Greenways: [nigreenways.wordpress.com](http://nigreenways.wordpress.com)
- Sustrans: [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)
- Belfast Active Travel Action Plan: [http://goo.gl/GFLte5](http://goo.gl/GFLte5)
- Northern Ireland Greenways: [nigreenways.wordpress.com](http://nigreenways.wordpress.com)

The route is suitable for novice and family cyclists of all ages and abilities and passes along the waterside of the Lagan Towpath and Belfast Lough. Attractions along the route include Union Locks and Lisburn, Lagan Valley Regional Park, Belfast’s Laganside Area and Belfast’s Dockland area.

The Lagan and Lough Cycle Way is a section of the National Cycle Network. It is very well connected to public transport with the Northern Ireland Railways network serving the cycle route throughout its length. Central station lies on the route whilst Lisburn and Jordanstown stations are within a few minutes cycle ride from either end. Many stations in between are only a short cycle ride or walk away from the route on quiet roads or traffic-free paths. This makes the cycle way very accessible and a great resource for encouraging walking and cycling amongst all sectors of the population.
Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy

Energy efficiency is a way of managing and restraining our spiralling energy consumption. Being energy efficient means doing the same amount of work but using less energy to do so. For example, if a house is well-insulated, less energy is used in heating and cooling to achieve a satisfactory temperature. Renewable energy technologies are becoming more widely accepted – large wind turbines provide electricity without the associated pollution, while solar panels are an increasingly common sight on domestic and commercial roofs.
Benefits of being energy efficient

Energy efficiency is a straightforward way to generate multiple benefits for the economy, the environment and people:

- Improving business competitiveness: businesses that successfully control their energy consumption can enjoy a competitive advantage by lowering heating, electricity and transportation costs
- Tackling climate change: greater energy efficiency can reduce the amount of fossil fuel derived energy being consumed in Northern Ireland, helping us to meet our climate change obligations
- Reducing local air pollutants: energy efficiency can reduce the amount of fossil fuels being burned; in turn, this can lower local air pollutants and fine particulate matter, as well as other chemicals that are harmful to human health, such as sulphur dioxide
- Lowering household energy bills: energy efficiency is a simple and effective way for families to save money on household expenses
- Enhancing quality of life: energy bills can make up a significant percentage of household expenditure. Some households have difficulty paying to heat their homes to a comfortable level and therefore are deemed to be suffering from fuel poverty. Energy efficiency is one of the most effective interventions to tackle fuel poverty and enhance comfort

Benefits of renewable energy

- Environmental protection: helps us to contribute to the UK’s legally-binding climate change targets through avoidance of carbon emissions and associated EU objectives
- Security of supply: reduces our dependence on imported fossil fuels, like coal and oil
- Costs: reduces our exposure to the global volatility of gas and oil prices
- NI Executive targets: contributes to the achievement of the Strategic Energy Framework targets – 40% electricity consumption from renewables and 10% renewable heat by 2020.
  The government provides grant support to some businesses and householders for the installation of renewable technologies

Planning and renewable energy

Planning policy aims to facilitate the siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations within the built and natural environment in order to achieve Northern Ireland’s renewable energy targets and to realise the benefits of renewable energy.

The policy objectives for renewable energy are to:

- Ensure that the environmental, landscape, visual and amenity impacts associated with, or arising from, renewable energy developments are adequately addressed
- Ensure adequate protection for the region’s built, natural and cultural heritage features
- Facilitate the integration of renewable energy technologies into the design, siting and layout of new developments and promote greater application of the principles of passive solar design

Additional information

- Energy Saving Trust: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/northern-ireland
- Action Renewables: www.actionrenewables.co.uk
- NI Direct: www nidirect.gov.uk/energy-efficiency
- Energy Efficiency and Micro Generation Project: www.sustainandbuild.com

Bangor Castle

Bangor Castle, also known as the Town Hall, was built over five years in the 1850s to replace an earlier castle on an adjacent site.

The council continues to balance the care of the mansion house with the pressures of delivering a modern service to the public from this listed building. Bangor Castle provides an excellent example of the most effective energy upgrade measures suited to listed buildings. Its exemplary works have been carefully considered to reduce the high levels of energy consumption, as would be expected with a building of its age, whilst remaining sympathetic to the building’s character.

For example, as a prominent landmark in the town, Bangor Castle is floodlit at night. The installation of solar photovoltaic panels on south facing roofs of ancillary buildings to the rear now allow the generation of green electricity during the day, which can then be stored in a battery storage tank and used to power the floodlights at night. The building’s heating system has also been made more energy efficient. To combat the high levels of air infiltration associated with the Castle’s original single glazed sliding sash windows, a proprietary draught-proofing system has been installed to reduce air infiltration and improve heat retention within the building. Visitors can see a real-time display of the building’s energy performance, comparing live data with historical energy consumption and carbon emissions data.

This landmark building is one of a number of council buildings that have been refurbished as part of a hugely successful EU-funded Energy Efficiency and Micro Generation Project. Other council buildings which showcase excellent energy efficiency technologies include The Palace, Armagh; Bridge Centre, Killyleagh; Craigavon Civic and Conference Centre and the Civic Building, Banbridge.

Slieve Kirk Wind Farm

CASE STUDY

Ards & North Down Borough Council
Enhancing Leisure and Recreation

Northern Ireland’s abundant landscapes, miles of coastline, forest parks, loughs and waterways provide endless possibilities for enjoying the great outdoors. Opportunities for leisure and recreation range from everyday activities such as walking and cycling, to dedicated sports, adventure pursuits and, increasingly, activity tourism. Developing, managing and promoting the numerous ways in which people can experience and enjoy what our region has to offer, is fundamental to encouraging active and healthy lifestyles. Leisure and recreation opportunities need to be accessible for all abilities that create ‘a culture of dynamic, sustainable outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland’ (Outdoor Recreation Plan).
Some opportunities and benefits of leisure and recreation:

- Supports mental and physical health and well-being
- Encourages participation in sports and activities
- Stimulates environmental awareness and the sustainable use of our natural and built assets
- Provides educational and personal development
- Facilitates activity based tourism and contributes to our economy

Planning the public realm for leisure and recreation

The public realm embraces the many spaces and places located within our cities, towns and villages and includes our streets, parks, civic buildings and shared facilities. Developing a high quality public realm is essential for creating attractive and accessible environments where people want to live and work. While the provision and maintenance of dedicated services and facilities such as leisure centres and play parks are vital, we should not underestimate the aesthetic appeal and feel good factor that emanates from the imaginative use of public space. Civic spaces may serve as the everyday functional areas that we simply pass through, but they also offer the potential for developing meaningful and symbolic places for use within our neighbourhoods and communities. The design and condition of our physical environment has a major impact on quality of life and can help encourage us to take pride in the places where we live.

The Lower Bann Canoe Trail is a 58km stretch of the River Bann from Lough Neagh to the Atlantic Ocean. Originating in Toome and finishing near Castlerock, the trail offers a unique way to experience this beautiful region. The route allows canoe enthusiasts of all abilities to enjoy the changing scenery of an area steeped in history, offering an alternative view on the bordering counties of Antrim and Derry/Londonderry. Passing through Lough Beg, the town of Coleraine and finishing near the National Trust Estuary Nature Reserve beside Portstewart Strand, eager canoeists can enjoy the many natural and built heritage assets of the area. The Lower Bann is home to a wide variety of habitats and wildlife. Along the route there are facilities for rough camping, but with a complete guide of access points, essential information and additional facilities all provided in a trail pack. The Lower Bann can be used for other water pursuits such as cruising and water skiing, as well as land based activities, such as walking and cycling for exploring the wider region.

Additional Information:
- Our Great Outdoors: www.doeni.gov.uk/reax
- Outdoor Recreation NI: www.outdoorrecreationni.com
- Canoe NI: www.canoeni.com
- Ecotrails: www.ecotrailsni.com
- Cycle NI: www.cycleni.com
- Walk NI: www.walkni.com/