



sustainable NI

Annual Report

2019-2020



Executive Summary

Sustainable Northern Ireland (SNI) works with partners to build a more sustainable and resilient society by inspiring, influencing and informing. We are committed to the principles of sustainable development; our work programmes encourage organisations to integrate these principles throughout their own operations and business planning functions. SNI also established the Belfast Food Network, to develop initiatives that will make Belfast a Sustainable Food City.

We offer a range of services to subscribing partners:

- Sustainability Training
- Strategy & Policy Development
- Forums & Networks
- Sustainability Reporting
- Sustainability within Community Planning
- Fundraising

This Review covers the period 2019-2020.

With introductory comments from the Chair of the Board of Directors, this report summarises our work with councils and other agencies through the Sustainable Development Forum. It covers our projects and partnership initiatives, policy and advocacy work, in addition to a governance update and financial summary.

Supported by:



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Chair's Report

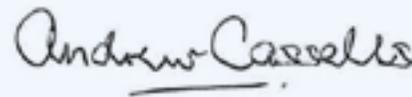
This year Sustainable Northern Ireland (SNI) has been incredibly busy working across a number of important policy and advocacy issues surrounding Brexit - grappling with implications for environmental protection, regulation and governance - and latterly in highlighting environmental opportunities following the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive. As the prospect of leaving the EU without a deal seems increasingly likely, we highlighted some of the most significant threats posed to the environment in our various consultation responses, whilst at the same time continuing to provide high quality support and advice to our members.

A few activities in particular stand out this year. Firstly the provision of comprehensive responses to government consultations on a future Environment Strategy and a future Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland. SNI will no doubt be putting significant effort into influencing these as they develop over the next year or two.

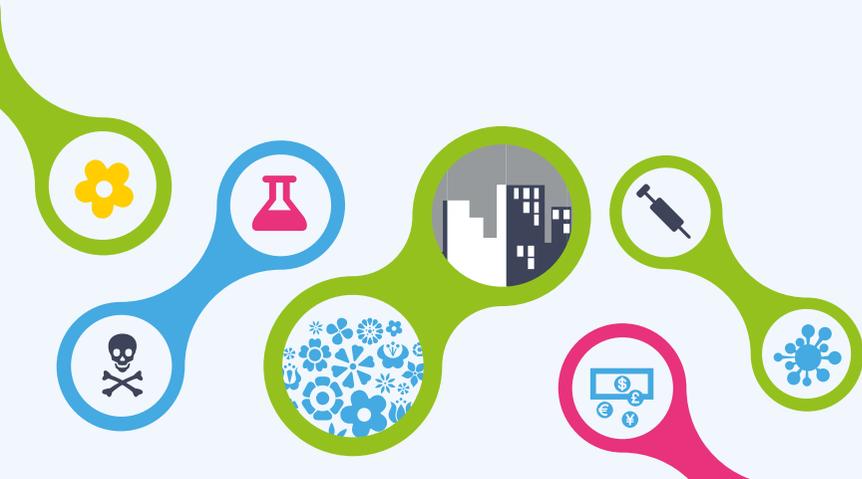
Secondly, in seizing the opportunity to establish and facilitate an All-Party Group on Climate Action. The group provides an important vehicle for stakeholders to influence policy; whilst at the same time increasing awareness of key issues with decision makers in central and local government, which is a primary focus for our work.

Our staff member continued to perform exceptionally well, showing great adaptability and resourcefulness as circumstances changed throughout the year.

We enter 2020 with a renewed sense of optimism, with greater political support on climate action and other environmental challenges, it is an opportune time for SNI to extend its role and reach in order to make a positive impact on policy and practice, and help secure the sustainable future we all want.



Andrew Cassells
Chair



Policy Development

Government Consultations

This year SNI has been actively involved in influencing policy by responding to a number of government consultations considered relevant to long-term sustainability objectives. These included:

- Reforming the UK packaging producer responsibility system (April 2019)
- Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (April 2019)
- DUP Pre-Consultation Paper: Our Green and Pleasant Land (September 2019)
- Review of the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) & Energy Efficiency Provision (October 2019)
- Maximum Resale Price for electricity as it applies to Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (January 2020)
- Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland (January 2020)
- Energy Strategy Call for Evidence (February 2020)
- PEACE PLUS Stakeholder Engagement Survey (February 2020)

Sustainable NI consultation responses can be viewed on our website: www.sustainableni.org/reports

New Decade, New Approach

The Northern Ireland Assembly was restored in January 2020, ending a three year hiatus in the region's devolved government. The deal which resurrected the devolved institutions — New Decade, New Approach — introduced significant institutional reforms and highlighted climate change as one of seven key priorities to be addressed in the next Programme for Government. It set out a number of ambitious environmental commitments including:

- The Executive's strategies to reduce carbon emissions will be reviewed in light of the Paris Climate Change Accord and the climate crisis.
- A new Energy Strategy will set ambitious targets and actions for a fair and just transition to a zero carbon society.
- The Executive should bring forward a Climate Change Act to give environmental targets a strong legal underpinning.
- The Executive will establish an independent Environmental Protection Agency to oversee this work and ensure targets are met.



Policy Development

- The Economic Strategy will support clean and inclusive growth and create jobs as part of a Green New Deal.
- The Executive will create a plan to eliminate plastic pollution.
- RHI will be closed down and replaced by a scheme that effectively cuts carbon emissions.

SNI recognises the New Decade, New Approach deal as a statement of intent by Government, to tackle what is arguably one of the most urgent and pressing social, economic and environmental challenges of our time - climate change.

The challenge now will be ensuring that the next Programme for Government delivers on the strategic priorities contained in the agreement, and that the aspirations are not diluted or delayed.



All Party Group on Climate Action

This year, SNI established an All-Party Group on Climate Action to influence policy direction on climate change, and hold the Executive to account on the climate and wider environmental commitments made in the New Decade, New Approach deal.

SNI was appointed secretary to the Group, which held its inaugural meeting on 24 January 2020. It was agreed that the membership would include elected representatives spanning both local and central government.

At the cross-section between policy and practice, SNI is well placed to support and facilitate political dialogue and, if needed, invoke political pressure on climate action and related sustainability issues. Our intention is to use this group to influence national climate policy, but also ensure that climate action is progressed as part of a wider sustainable development agenda. We will promote a holistic approach to embedding climate action into the next Programme for Government, ensuring that it is guided by the Sustainable Development Goals. (For more information on the All-Party Group see p7).



Forums & Networks

Sustainable Development Forum

SNI coordinates the Sustainable Development Forum which was set up by local government to share experience, best practice and build the skills of its members, all of whom have responsibilities for sustainable development within their organisations.

Membership over the years has extended from local councils, to include the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Meetings this year were organised around topics selected by the Forum, to facilitate suitable representation and focussed discussions. Four meetings took place this year:

- 19 June 2019, *Social Farms and Gardens*, Incredible Edibles Site Visit, Cloughmills
- 18 September 2019, *The Climate Emergency*, Belfast City Council
- 11 December 2019, *Community Planning*, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
- 20 March 2019, *Setting Science-Based Carbon Reduction Targets*, Virtual Meeting

Quarterly network meetings help to share and stimulate good practice on sustainable development among councils and other public sector organisations. The development of the Knowledge Hub this year helped to support the Forum by fostering additional awareness and engagement between meetings.

All-Party Group on Climate Action

This year SNI facilitated the establishment of a new cross-party group of MLAs and Councillors who share a common interest in the development of policy to address the climate crisis, in Northern Ireland.

Whilst not an official Stormont committee, we hope the group will be influential in holding the Government to climate and environmental commitments made in the New Decade, New Approach deal (see p6).

The Group had its inaugural meeting in January 2020, to appoint a Chair (Rachel Woods MLA), Vice Chair (John Blair MLA), Secretary (Nichola Hughes, Sustainable NI) and agree the Terms of Reference.

It is hoped that as well as encouraging cross-party support for climate-friendly policies, the group will also help raise awareness about key issues best practice in the area of climate action and sustainable development as well as encourage more central-local government co-operation and coordination on these issues.



Tackling Plastic NI

SNI also facilitates the Tackling Plastic NI Working Group, which is a sub-group of the Sustainable Development Forum. Members include local councils and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). The group met three times this year, including:

- 11 September 2019, Parliament Buildings
- 16 January 2020, Parliament Buildings
- 10 March 2020, Lough Neagh Discovery and Conference Centre

Meetings included presentations from Refill Ireland, the Education Authority and Queen's University Belfast and facilitated discussion on council approaches to tackling the issue of single-use plastic.

For more information on the Tackling Plastic NI project see page 9.



Knowledge & Awareness



Rewarding Excellence

SNI was delighted to sponsor the 'Excellence in Environmental Sustainability' category at the 2019 Local Government Awards, which took place in the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Belfast on 20 February.

The Awards are coordinated by the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) and the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE). This year's Awards attracted 58 entries.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council was this year's winner for its 'Live Smart' Campaign, which aims to engage staff and the wider community in debate and actions which promote sustainability within the borough. Judges were particularly impressed by the Council's leadership in fostering practical community level action.

Runners up in the category were Mid Ulster District Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council.

Raising Awareness

SNI facilitates the sharing of information and best practice with stakeholders through a variety of communication channels including social media, emails and eBulletins, as well as the website through blogs, news articles and case studies.

In addition, our various forums allow us to showcase innovative solutions and thought leaders, in order to raise awareness and encourage replication of good practice. Speakers and projects highlighted this year included:

- Declan Donnelly, *Incredible Edibles Community Garden, Causeway Coast and Glens*
- Patricia Wallace, *Social Farms and Gardens*
- Catherine Hunter, *Environment Champions Programme, Mid and East Antrim*
- Professor John Barry, *Translating Climate Emergency Declarations into Climate Action, Queen's University Belfast*
- Dr Chris Jones, *Science-Based Carbon Reduction Targets, Tyndall Centre Manchester*
- Barry O'Connor, *Running Zero Waste Events, Refill Ireland*
- John Coney, *Reducing Plastic in Schools, Education Authority*

At the meetings, members have the opportunity to ask questions and troubleshoot problems with expert speakers and their peers.



Sharing Resources

This year, SNI established an online knowledge hub to help members to interact with each other between meetings and facilitate online access to resources.

The online community of practice has a range of functionalities to support the work of the Sustainable Development Forum including a Discussion Forum and a Library for sharing group documents.

Resources provided include:

- Climate Action Planning Framework
- Terms of Reference for All Party Group on Climate Change
- Social Value Toolkit
- Whole Lifecycle Carbon Assessment Guidance
- Developing a CO₂ baseline - a step-by-step guide



Knowledge & Awareness

Case Studies

SNI continues to promote and share good practice on sustainable development at every opportunity.

Throughout the year we published a selection of case studies on our website, for example:

- the Handiheat Project which is led by Northern Ireland Housing Association, aims to improve domestic energy efficiency in rural areas
- the Recycling Investment Fund in Ards and North Down which uses council recycling income for local environmental improvement schemes
- the trial of environmentally friendly alternatives to single-use plastic consumables at the Slow Food Festival, organised by Derry City and Strabane District Council
- the options appraisal carried out by Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council to reduce single-use plastic across their estate

We will continue to research and compile high quality case studies, adding to the existing bank of best practice collated from across Northern Ireland, Great Britain and further afield.

Tackling Plastic Event

SNI organised an event on 18 June 2019 for Elected Members, Council Officers and Government Officials to learn more about the impact of single-use plastics on the environment and what organisations can do to mitigate it.

The event was used to formally launch the Tackling Plastic NI project, raise awareness about the Plastic Promise campaign, share stories of success from elsewhere and encourage collaboration in the public sector.

The event was attended by 70 people from 33 organisations. Delegate feedback was positive. 90% of delegates strongly agreed their awareness and understanding about what the public sector can do to tackle the issue of single-use plastic had increased as a result of the event.

Speakers included:

- Gillian Kinnier, DAERA
- Keith Patterson, WRAP
- Ian Humphries, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful
- David Lindsay, Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Dr Tara Shine, Plastic Free Kinsale
- Colm Warren, Natural World Products
- Angela Halpenny, Northern Ireland Water

Climate Seminar

We were pleased to contribute to the planning and delivery of a Local Government Climate Seminar on 5 March 2020.

The event examined how local councils can translate climate emergency declarations into practical actions and long-term policy goals.

The half-day seminar, organised by the Association of Public Sector Excellence (APSE), took place at Millbrook Lodge Hotel. The event attracted a range of expert speakers, officers and elected members from local government in Northern Ireland, underlining Councils' commitment to tackling the climate emergency.

Our Executive Director spoke about local authority climate action in terms of key priorities for action, how to balance adaptation and mitigation strategies, and what the big asks are of local councils.



Projects & Partnerships



Tackling Plastic NI

The issue of plastic waste and its impact on the environment is regularly highlighted in the media. Plastic isn't all bad. It's our misuse of plastic that's the problem. Most of it is single-use and is thrown away within just a few minutes of use, often ending up in the natural environment where it can take up to a thousand years to break down.

To tackle this misuse of plastic, SNI has partnered with Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful to deliver a project which aims to change behaviours and cultural norms around the consumption of plastic, by delivering interventions and campaigns.

Funded by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), the project is now in its second year and is aiming to tackle plastic waste, by encouraging businesses, schools, councils, and citizens to make simple changes to reduce consumption of single-use plastic.

Council Support

SNI leads the council workstream, and this year established the Tackling Plastic NI Working Group to facilitate dialogue and collaboration between local councils and DAERA in changing policies and practices to reduce single-use plastic on the public sector estate. SNI supports the group by facilitating meetings and developing policy guidance, communications resources, monitoring tools and best practice to help councils encourage a more responsible approach to the use of plastic, both on their estates and in their local areas.

SNI worked closely with DAERA and the Department of Finance to develop a clause for insertion in public sector tenders to mitigate single-use plastic. A template procurement policy was circulated to councils for use in future tender exercises, as required.

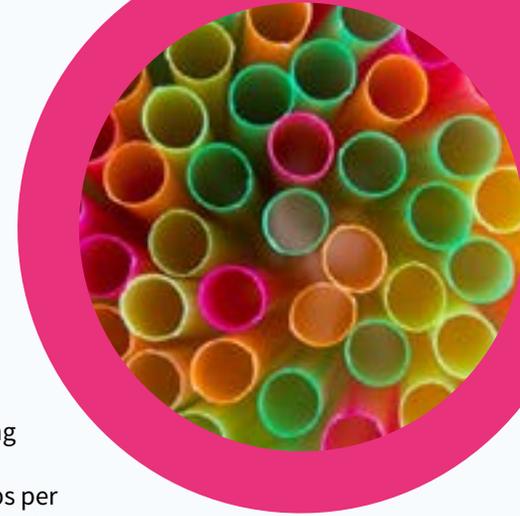
Making an impact

This year nine out of 11 councils introduced a corporate ban on single-use plastic cups, saving an estimated 6.6 million plastic cups per year. Councils have also taken steps to reduce the number of hot beverage cups, stirrers and condiments in their cafeterias and concessions. Four councils are now signed up to the project's Plastic Promise.

Additionally, a number of plastic-free council events took place across Northern Ireland this year following support from the project, including:

- Sea Bangor Festival
- Causeway Coast Marathon
- Slow Food Festival, Derry

Councils continue to take steps to minimise single-use plastic across their operations, for example when providing food concession permits and community event grant aid. SNI also supported DAERA on the development of a Plastic Reduction Action Plan, to guide the removal of pointless plastic on the government estate.



Projects & Partnerships



eNGO involvement in Community Planning

SNI received funding from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) to review the involvement of environmental organisations in Community Planning and opportunities to improve engagement in the Community Plan review process.

Following the announcement of new responsibilities for councils under the 2014 Local Government Act to undertake Community Planning, Sustainable Northern Ireland produced a publication, *'Places for People – a sustainable planning guide for councillors'*. The aim of the guide was to inspire, enthuse and spotlight some of the wonderful natural and built heritage assets that are to be found in districts throughout Northern Ireland, and support councillors in the delivery of their new responsibilities.

Five years on and 11 Community Plans have been published, each with their own environmental themes, outcomes, indicators and actions.

In 2019, SNI secured funding from DAERA to review the level of engagement and participation of environmental organisations in Community Planning, and examine the impact this has had on environmental themes, outcomes and actions in the Community Plans.

We commissioned Community Places to assist with interviewing environmental organisations in Northern Ireland, in order to assess the level of involvement in Community Planning to date, and whether there are any barriers to participation.

We also conducted a scan of environmental issues in the Community Plans. The initial research found a wide range of environmental themes, outcomes and actions across the 11 Community Plans and whilst sustainability was a common theme, climate change only featured in a few plans.



Conclusions

The research concluded that the absence of a statutory environmental agency in Northern Ireland is a major impediment to the delivery of environmental outcomes in Community Plans. Community Planning Partnerships expect that eNGOs will participate in their processes but are unable to provide any resources to facilitate this.

Whilst there is an appetite for engaging in the upcoming review of the Community Plans in 2021, environmental organisations feel engaging with all 11 reviews will be challenging and beyond their resources. As a result, there is a risk that the environment sector will be underrepresented in the Community Plan review process.

The report included recommendations for greater coordination and sharing of environment sector resources in order to positively influence Community Planning. The report was shared with the Department for Communities, DAERA and NI Environment Link for consideration.



Governance

Staff

SNI welcomed Nichola Hughes back from maternity leave in September 2019 and said farewell to Emma Adair, who returned to Ards and North Down Borough Council after a successful secondment as interim SNI Manager.

There were no further staff appointments in 2019/20.

Hosting

SNI is hosted by Northern Ireland Environment Link at 89 Loopland Drive, Belfast, BT6 9DW.

Northern Ireland Environment Link provides office space and financial administrative support for a fixed annual fee.

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors met on the following dates during 2019/20:

- 30 April 2019
- 25 June 2019
- 10 September 2019
- 10 December 2019 (AGM)
- 23 March 2020

The following board members resigned during 2019/20:

- John Barry
- Sue Christie
- Karen Smyth

One new board member was appointed in 2019/20:

- Susann Power

Policies & Procedures

A risk register is updated and board member interests are declared at the beginning of each board meeting. Director declarations of interests are updated annually.

Sustainable NI's five-year corporate strategy remained unchanged.

Finances

In 2019/20 the following organisations subscribed to our services:

- Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- Belfast City Council
- Derry City and Strabane District Council
- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
- Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
- Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
- Mid Ulster District Council
- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
- Northern Ireland Assembly
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive

In addition, we received funding from DAERA to support projects on single-use plastic and community planning.

An annual budget is approved in March each year. Accounts are prepared at quarterly intervals and expenditure is monitored against the budget. The accounts are audited on an annual basis by an independent examiner, and presented to the Board of Directors for approval at the AGM in December.



Financial Summary

31 March 2020

Directors' statement on the summary financial statement

The Board of Directors/Trustees present herewith the summary financial statement of Sustainable Northern Ireland for the year ended 31 March 2020 and confirm the following:

- the summary financial statement is not the statutory financial accounts but is a summary of information relating to both the Statement of Financial Activities and the balance sheet;
- the full financial statements from which the summary is derived have been externally examined by an independent auditor; and he has provided an unqualified report;
- the full annual accounts, the external examiners report and the Directors' Report can be obtained on application to Sustainable Northern Ireland;
- the annual accounts were approved by the Board on 2 December 2020

This Directors' Statement was approved by the Board of Directors on 2 December 2020 and signed on its behalf by:

Nichola Hughes / Company Secretary

Independent examiner's statement to the members of Sustainable Northern Ireland

I have examined the summary financial statement of Sustainable Northern Ireland.

Respective responsibilities of directors/trustees and auditors

The directors/trustees are responsible for preparing the summary financial statement in accordance with applicable law. My responsibility is to report to you my opinion on the consistency of the summary financial statement with the full annual accounts and Directors' Report, and its compliance with the relevant requirements of Section 427 of the Companies Act 2006 and the regulations made thereunder. I also read the other information contained in the summary financial statement and consider the implications for my report if I become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the summary financial statement.

Basis of opinion

I conducted our work in accordance with Bulletin 1999/6 "The auditors' statement on the summary financial statement" issued by the Auditing Practices Board for use in the United Kingdom.

Opinion

In my opinion, the summary financial statement is consistent with the full annual accounts and Directors' Report of Sustainable Northern Ireland for the year ended 31 March 2020 and complies with the applicable requirements of Section 427 of the Companies Act 2006, and the regulations made thereunder.

Nigel V Skillen FCA

Diamond & Skillen Chartered Accountants and Registered Auditor
Sinclair House 89/101 Royal Avenue Belfast BT1 1FE

2 December 2020

Extracted Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31st March 2020



	Notes	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted funds £	Totals 2020 £	Totals 2019 £
Income					
<i>from donations and legacies</i>					
• Donations	3	-	-	0	-
• Grants	3	58,000	8,000	66,000	72,000
<i>from charitable activities</i>					
• Business income and sponsorship	3	-	-	0	940
• Project admin	3	5,835	-	5,835	-
<i>from other activities</i>					
• Investment income	3	155	-	155	153
Total income		63,990	8,000	71,990	73,093
Expenditure					
<i>on raising funds</i>					
• Promotional costs	4	600	-	600	3,581
<i>on charitable activities</i>					
• Employee costs	4	39,142	-	39,142	41,787
• Premises costs	4	672	-	672	597
• Travel & training costs	4	1,040	48	1,088	882
• General administration costs	4	6,027	-	6,027	2,667
• Programme costs	4	406	13,057	13,463	10,525
<i>On other items</i>					
• Legal & professional fees	4	2,580	-	2,580	2,555
• Other expenses	4	226	-	226	301
• Depreciation of assets	4	-	-	0	-
Total expenditure		50,693	13,105	63,798	62,895
Net income / (expenditure) for the year		13,297	(5,105)	8,192	10,198
Transfers between funds	10	(101)	101	0	-
Net movement in funds for the year		13,196	(5,004)	8,192	10,198
<i>Reconciliation of funds</i>					
• Fund balances brought fwd at 1st April		49,107	-	49,107	38,909
• Fund balances carried fwd at 31st March		62,303	(5,004)	57,299	49,107

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses in the year.

	Notes	2019 £	2019 £
Fixed Assets			
• Tangible assets	11	-	-
		0	0
Current Assets			
• Receivables	12	13,365	17,743
• Cash at bank and in hand		48,939	42,792
		62,304	60,535
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	13	(5,005)	(11,428)
Net current assets		57,299	49,107
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		57,299	49,107
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year		-	-
Net assets		57,299	49,107
The funds of the charity			
<i>Unrestricted income funds:</i>			
• General funds	16	62,303	49,107
		62,303	49,107
<i>Restricted income funds:</i>			
• Single Use Plastic (SUP) Project	16	-	-
• Environmental Fund	16	(5,004)	-
Total funds		57,299	49,107

The summary financial statement was approved by the Board of Directors on 2 December 2020 and signed on their behalf by:

Andrew Cassells

Chairman, Board of Directors

Adrian Davis

Treasurer

sustainableNI



Our vision

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

Our mission

Building a sustainable society by inspiring, influencing and informing.



Inspire

We inspire individuals and organisations by sharing stories of success



Influence

We influence policy and practice by providing technical and strategic support



Inform

We share knowledge about how to address common sustainability challenges

Our values

SNI aspires to excellence in everything it does. We pride ourselves on being:

Knowledgeable

We focus on understanding the global and national issues around sustainability and sharing that knowledge with key stakeholders.

Collaborative

We work closely with partners to co-design and deliver solutions to common sustainability challenges.

Transformative

We put sustainability at the heart of society in Northern Ireland, transforming how people think, live and work.

Our status

SNI is a non-profit organisation which works with government and others to advance sustainable development in Northern Ireland.

Established in 1998, we are now a registered charity (Charity No NIC103426) as well as a company limited by guarantee in Northern Ireland (Company No NI038784). We are governed by a Board of Directors comprising representatives from the public, private and voluntary and community sectors.

We have placed environmental and social goals at the heart of what we do and we are diversifying our funding base. Delivering for governments and public bodies is the cornerstone of our approach.

Our partners

SNI works with and supports government, local authorities, businesses, and others; acting as a catalyst for positive action to build a sustainable and resilient society. For a full list of our partners, please see www.sustainableni.org/our-partners

sustainable NI

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Sustainable Northern Ireland is a Company limited by guarantee No NI038784 and a Charity registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland No NIC103426

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