

ANNUAL REPORT

2023/24

Sustainable
Northern Ireland



BEHIND THE COVER

The image on the cover depicts dark blue ocean waves and is a timely reminder of the fragility of marine ecosystems and that the fate of our oceans is at risk from acidification, pollution and overfishing. This not only puts marine life at risk, it puts all of humanity at risk. Through a sustainable net zero economy, we can relieve these pressures, bringing humanity back within a safe operating space.



Sustainable NI is an independent charity driving sustainability in Northern Ireland. Our mission is to inspire, influence and inform government and others to build a sustainable and resilient society.

We deliver our mission through education, advocacy and support services that empower organisations to adopt more sustainable practices, paving the way towards a greener and more responsible future.

Our vision is a society that meets its needs from local, renewable resources, enabling people to live healthy, happy lives without compromising the planet.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

DR RACHAEL SINGLETON
Lecturer at Ulster University
Business School



Rachael is currently the Chair of the Sustainable NI Board. She is an experienced behavioural scientist who works for the Northern Ireland Civil Service Innovation Lab where she applies psychology to the design and implementation of policy to solve key societal challenges such as climate change.

ROBERT CLEMENTS
Head of Sustainable
Development at
NI Housing Executive



Robert is Head of Sustainable Development at the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the largest social housing provider in Northern Ireland, where he leads the team responsible for residential energy efficiency, decarbonisation and mitigating fuel poverty.

ALAN MCVICKER
Head of Council Support Unit
at Strategic Investment Board



Alan is Head of the Strategic Investment Board’s Council Support Unit which supports councils in the delivery of their capital programmes, with a particular emphasis on waste and the circular economy.

ANDREW BENFIELD
Ireland Country Manager
at Cenex



Andrew is Regional Manager at Cenex, an independent, not-for-profit research technology organisation (RTO) and consultancy, specialising in zero emission transport and energy.

SUSANN POWER
Lecturer at Ulster
University Business School



Susann is a lecturer in Hospitality Management at Ulster University and holds a PhD in Sustainable Tourism. She has recently been appointed the Chair of the University’s Sustainability Committee. She is also a National Jury Member for Blue Flag International.

JAC CALLAN
Sustainability & Impact
Manager at Visit Belfast



Jac is Sustainability & Impact Manager for Visit Belfast, where she works alongside Belfast City Council and tourism stakeholders to help Belfast become a leading sustainable tourism and events destination.

KEITH PATTERSON
Sector Specialist in Waste
and Recycling at WRAP
Northern Ireland



Keith is a waste and recycling specialist at WRAP where he uses an evidence-based approach to develop resource management strategies, behaviour change campaigns, tools, and resources aimed at maximising the value and use of materials.

IAN GARNER
Consultant at Ulster
Wildlife



Ian served for 20 years as head of WRAP in Northern Ireland, a key resource efficiency delivery body for the public sector. He currently provides support to Ulster Wildlife on peatland restoration and its long-term management.

TEAM
MEMBERS

NICHOLA HUGHES
Executive Director



Known for her tenacity and optimism, Nichola uses her skills in science and communication to empower others to act on the planetary emergency. She is an experienced climate scientist, policy advisor and communicator and is dedicated to channelling her energy for environmental and social justice.

CLARE BAILEY
Interim Executive Director



Clare was MLA for South Belfast from 2016-2022 and is a former leader of the Green Party in Northern Ireland. During this time, she worked with Climate Coalition NI to introduce Northern Ireland's first Climate Change Bill. Clare is experienced in strategic management and with her extensive cross-sectoral networks is excited about building a climate-positive future for Northern Ireland.

**DR FRANCESCA
DI PALO**
Head of Public Sector
Services



Francesca is an environmental scientist and ecologist focusing on natural carbon sinks. The desire to merge academia with a hands-on career built on enhancing environmental attitudes and promoting positive behaviour change has led her to develop expertise and experience in a range of areas from conservation to education for sustainable development at an international level. Francesca's energy and passion motivate everyone around her.

DR CLAIRE MCVEIGH
Head of Advisory Services



Claire is a climate scientist with a PhD investigating carbon sequestration in peatland environments. She is passionate about supporting organisations to make positive environmental and social change and has gained experience with a wide range of businesses, including supporting strategy development and environmental impact assessment. Claire enjoys sharing her expertise and being a catalyst for positive change.

OISIN FLEMING
Project Support Officer



Oisín is a Project Support Officer working on a 2-year Innovate UK-funded project to support Derry City and Strabane District Council in realising the ambition of a net zero climate resilient city and district by 2045. Oisín holds an MSc in Global Strategy in Environmental Health and Sustainability and a BA Hons in English from Ulster University.

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, we highlight how we are working to support Northern Ireland's transition to a green, net zero economy. We reflect on both highlights from the work we completed in 2023 and the ongoing projects and partnerships we're involved in that continue to bear fruits.

This year Sustainable NI has been incredibly busy growing the team and expanding services. Supported by the National Lottery Dormant Accounts Fund NI and subscriptions from councils and public bodies, we've been working on becoming more resilient by pursuing activities that will increase our capacity to support the transition to Net Zero. With this goal in mind, during the year our Board and Team carried out a strategic review of Sustainable NI's brand, mission, aims, services and values. The outcomes of the review fed into a new brand identity, operational plan and website. A new strategy and website will be published at the end of 2024.

This year we added two new members to our team. Clare Bailey stepped in as Interim Director covering our Director's maternity leave and a Project Support Officer joined us on a fixed-term basis as part of a 2-year Innovate UK-funded project to support Derry City and Strabane District Council to realise the ambition of a net zero climate resilient city and district by 2045.

In continuing to facilitate the All-Party Group on Climate Action we remain focused on ensuring climate action is a political priority so politicians can take decisive action. Despite the political hiatus, we have continued to respond to government consultations on policy issues deemed critical to the Net Zero transition, including the draft Carbon Budget and proposals for Public Body Climate Change Reporting Duties.

Our staff continue to perform exceptionally well, with a marked increase in educational outreach and support this year. The Sustainable Development Forum continues to be a critical support for local government and public bodies, driving and supporting sustainability and climate action across the region. We were delighted when staff member Francesca Di Palo, Head of Public Sector Services, won the prestigious C03 Leading Sustainability Award during the year, a welcome acknowledgement of all her skills and leadership on sustainability.

This year, we attended more events and reached a wider audience than ever before. From engaging with Chambers of Commerce to attending local school events, we continue to challenge thinking and raise awareness about the need to be more sustainable and how to achieve it.

We also expanded our training offering, providing two new courses: Sustainable Design & Construction (for public sector officers working on capital projects and public realm schemes) and Carbon Literacy Training. We hope to promote these training courses next year.

We continue to offer sustainability audits for businesses and organisations looking to establish a baseline to measure and evaluate progress on sustainability. We see this as an opportunity for growth. We also want to do more to support the third sector. We received a small grant to support the GAA Green Clubs Programme in Northern Ireland, which we hope will be a catalyst for Sustainable NI to play a role in supporting the voluntary and community sector.

All of this activity exists in the context of a rapidly escalating climate and ecological crisis. Northern Ireland must achieve Net Zero emissions by 2050. This is a monumental challenge. Organisations are beginning to wake up to the challenge, but there is still a sizeable policy, knowledge and resource gap.

As we enter 2024/25, we will prioritise our resources to support and guide organisations to push the boundaries on climate action. With a Climate Change Act now in place and public body reporting duties looming, it is an opportune time for Sustainable NI to extend its role and reach to make a positive impact on policy and practice and help secure the sustainable future we all want.

2 IMPACT SUMMARY

Deliverables this year:



2

BUSINESS AUDITS



4

CONSULTATION
RESPONSES



1,745

PEOPLE TRAINED



4

STRATEGIES &
ACTION PLANS



26

WORKSHOPS
OR EVENTS



18

LEARNING
RESOURCES

1,745

People trained

9,700

Visitors on our website



Sustainable Development Forum site visit, Bangor Castle

3 OUR GOALS

Our purpose is to promote a more sustainable way of living and working to protect the planet and its resources, for the benefit of society, now and in the future. We deliver this objective through four strategic goals:

1. INFORM

Create positive environmental and social change through education and awareness.

2. REFORM

Advocate for regulatory and legislative change to advance climate action.

3. TRANSFORM

Provide practical support to help organisations achieve their sustainability goals.

4. IMPROVE

Ensure excellent standards and continuous improvement to provide the best service to our members and clients.



4 EDUCATION & AWARENESS

We work to create positive environmental and social change through our education and awareness activities. In 2023/24 these included:

DISSEMINATING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

We used a variety of platforms to inform and influence others including:

- Digital newsletter (reach: 600+ people)
- Social media (reach: 3700+ people)
- Website (reach: 9,700+ people)

Resources developed this year:

- Cloughjordan Ecovillage Case Study - a model for sustainability and community resilience
- Killeavy Castle Case Study - an example of sustainable tourism and hospitality
- Lámh Dhearg GAA Case Study - a Green Sports Club
- Springfield Meadows Case Study - a Net Zero Passivhaus Development
- 12 Blogs/Articles for the website
- Briefing note on the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 for Elected Members

Key presentations and talks delivered this year to:

- Launch of Competition & Markets Authority Net Zero Forum
- C03 Annual Conference
- Killeavy Castle Restoration Project Launch
- Habitat for Humanity One World Festival
- Belfast Climate Commission Roundtable on Priority Work streams
- SOLACE/Co-Operation Ireland Conference
- Roundtable with Julie Harrison Permanent Secretary NI Office
- CCEA Climate Group - embedding climate education in the curriculum
- Mid Ulster District Council Climate Working Group
- Chamber of Commerce Festival of Business
- NI Polymers Association Quarterly Meeting
- NI Sports and Human Rights Forum
- Translink Active Travel Awards
- Linen Quarter Sustainable Business Event

PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY AND DIVERSE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

We delivered the following workshops / training courses this year:

- Sustainable Design & Construction for Capital Projects (received by Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council)
- How to become a Sustainable Business (received by businesses in Ards and North Down Borough Council)
- How to develop a Climate Action Plan (received by Mid Ulster District Council and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council)
- Circet Ireland Graduate Workshop
- BBC Northern Ireland Climate Change Training

PROVIDING THE SECRETARIAT FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FORUM

The mission of the Sustainable Development Forum is to co-ordinate and support local government and public bodies to lead transformative change and measurable climate action across the region. Membership is exclusive to the public sector. As a member, public bodies have year-round access to an annual programme of meetings, webinars and policy briefings. They also benefit from expert insights from a dedicated Sustainable NI advisor, who coordinates the Forum. The Chair is currently Emma Adair from Ards and North Down Borough Council.

This year four meetings of the Forum were held:

- 15 June 2023 (Bangor Castle)
- 20 September 2023 (Ecos Hub, Ballymena)
- 23 November 2023 (Cookstown)
- 13 December 2023 (Virtual)
- 6 March 2023 (Virtual)

We led a Needs Analysis Workshop on 23 November in the Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre bringing sustainability officers from across Northern Ireland together to understand what is needed strategically for local authorities to fully integrate sustainability and climate action into governance, management and delivery at the local level. The session highlighted policy and skills gaps and how Sustainable NI can better support councils going forward.



Sustainable NI speaking at a Citizen's Jury on Car Dependency, Belfast

We advocate for ambitious legislative and regulatory change in support of our mission through our policy and advocacy work. In 2023/24 this included:

ACTIVELY ENGAGING IN POLICY FORMULATION, APPRAISAL AND LOBBYING

As political appetite for the green economy continues to grow, knowledge needs to be cultivated and shared to ensure we make the correct policy choices to achieve net zero by 2050. This year we fed into several policies that will be critical to Northern Ireland meeting its net zero aspirations, including:

- Climate Change Reporting by Specified Public Bodies
- Review of SPPS on the Issue of Climate Change
- Northern Ireland Carbon Budget (2030 - 2040)
- Circular Economy Strategy

In addition to providing written consultation responses, we participated in government forums and committees which shape policy and investment in energy and environment:

- NI Affairs Committee Inquiry into Investment in Northern Ireland (sustainable and gender-equitable investment)
- NI Advisory Group on non-household recycling provisions

We also promoted our manifesto for the Northern Ireland Assembly (see opposite). In the document, we highlighted five key issues that must be addressed to put the economy on a more sustainable footing whilst simultaneously tackling the climate emergency.

PROVIDING THE SECRETARIAT FOR THE ALL-PARTY GROUP ON CLIMATE ACTION

The All-Party Group on Climate Action is a forum for discussion between politicians, NGOs, business leaders and academics, to advance climate action through legislative and regulatory change in the Assembly and Executive.

Sustainable NI provides the secretariat for the group. Membership is cross-party and includes representatives from the NI Assembly and NI councils. At the AGM in October 2023, Danny Donnelly MLA took over from Kate Nicholl MLA as Chair of the APG.

For the 300+ observers, it is a great way to keep abreast of climate and environmental policy and legislation and influence policymakers at the highest level in Northern Ireland.

The APG met five times in 2023/24, including:

- 12 May 2023
- 6 October 2023 (AGM)
- 3 November 2023
- 1 December 2023
- 1 March 2024

A range of issues, projects and campaigns were discussed, from examples of local authority climate action to strengthening energy efficiency through changes to building regulations. Attendance remains excellent with 11 elected members and 41 observers on average attending each meeting.

PRIORITIES IN OUR MANIFESTO FOR THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY:

1. **Green government agenda** to ensure the government 'does as it says' in relation to protecting our climate and environment.
2. **Improved planning for a green economy** calling for a simplification of local authority and regional planning in support of renewable and low-carbon energy, including better guidance on ways to achieve Net-Zero.
3. **End government support for fossil fuels** and introduce incentives for energy efficiency measures, heat pumps, district heating and low-carbon retrofit measures.
4. **More investment in sustainable travel infrastructure** through a Clean Air Act and strategic review of public transport pricing, availability and cycling infrastructure.
5. **More government support for community energy** so that community groups can explore the feasibility of community energy schemes.

We provide practical support to help organisations achieve their sustainability goals. Our advisory services include strategy development, audits, training and communications.

STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS

Sustainability has become increasingly critical for organisations to remain relevant and competitive. Like digital transformation, driving sustainability requires organisations to transform every business division, making sustainability an integral part of corporate strategy. This year, we helped four organisations develop their sustainability and climate plans, each one tailored to the individual client's support needs:

- Apex Housing Association
- Mid Ulster District Council
- Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
- Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

The organisations received workshops as well as consultancy support to co-design the strategies with staff and decision-makers.

SUSTAINABILITY AUDITS

Our Sustainability Audit measures sustainability in a company's day-to-day operations and its overall business model. It identifies opportunities to rethink and improve upon product and service design, operations, and business models to maximise social and environmental impact. This year, we carried out sustainability audits for two businesses:

- Oh Yeah Music Centre, Belfast
- Castle Mall, Antrim

The output was a clear sustainability roadmap to guide the companies on how to embed sustainability within the core of the business.

PARTNERSHIPS

The power of partnership working cannot be understated. Partnerships build momentum, coordinating action between organisations and allowing opportunities to exchange views, support innovation and provide momentum to get things done. Sustainable NI partnerships this year included:

- Sustainable Development Forum
- Circular Economy Coalition
- Northern Ireland EV Consortium
- Climate Coalition NI
- Environmental Justice Network Ireland

PROJECTS

We were a delivery partner in the following projects this year:

- Green Clubs Programme - Led by the GAA, the programme was designed to promote sustainability awareness and action in sports clubs and communities (see opposite).
- Derry and Strabane – Net Zero – From Ambition to Action - Sustainable NI was a delivery partner on an Innovate UK-funded project to realise the ambition of a net zero climate resilient City and District by 2045 through transformational systems including SMART climate action plans underpinned by place-based insights, collaboration and capacity building. We are providing expertise and guidance on sustainable procurement and measuring scope 3 emissions.
- CCEA Expert Group - Sustainable NI alongside other expert groups supported CCEA to review a Northern Ireland Key Stage 2 curriculum objective on sustainable development.

PROJECT: GREEN CLUBS

Sustainable NI was a delivery partner on the GAA Green Clubs Programme in 2023. Enabled through a grant from LFT Charitable Trust, the programme aimed to build environmental awareness and action across the operations and activities of Gaelic clubs and their communities across Northern Ireland. We assisted with the recruitment of clubs and engaged councils and other expert organisations to support clubs. We facilitated staff training and provided advice to help clubs identify and deliver green actions.

The programme has been hugely successful, supporting **32 clubs**, training **128 people** in green skills, delivering **64 green actions** and indirectly changing the behaviour of **6,080 people**. Green Clubs is an excellent model of citizen-led sustainability and hope to see it transferred to all sports clubs.

Case studies are available at:
<https://learning.gaa.ie/GreenClub/CaseStudies>

1. BUILDING AWARENESS

As a result of training interventions, Green Team members have an improved understanding and awareness of environmental issues and can connect how individual and local actions contribute to local and global environmental issues.

2. INCREASING SKILLS

Club leaders were encouraged to shadow expert organisations and as a result can conduct simple energy, waste, water, biodiversity and transport audits. They can carry out a strategy session to develop a Green Action Plan, and know where to get additional funding for measures. Green Team members have committed to passing these green skills on to other members.

3. CHANGING BEHAVIOURS

Over 64 green actions in Northern Ireland have been registered as a direct consequence of the programme. Actions include energy improvements, recycling points, eliminating single-use plastic, planting trees and hedgerows, planting pollinator-friendly flowers, swapping sports gear, cycling initiatives, carpooling, and water saving measures.

4. IMPROVING WELLBEING

We have been successful in promoting the links between the environment and health and wellbeing, as well as the benefits collaborative voluntary action can bring to communities and individuals. Following the installation of green measures, such as trees, flowers and bicycle facilities, club members report feeling healthier, more active, and more connected to nature and the community.



7 GOVERNANCE & IMPROVING STANDARDS

We are continually striving to ensure excellent standards and continuous improvement to provide the best service to our members and clients.

ENSURING GOOD GOVERNANCE

This year we said goodbye to one board member, Ian Garner, who resigned on 12 December 2023. All Trustees received governance training and completed a skills assessment when they joined the organisation.

Four board meetings took place this year, including:

- 13 June 2023
- 19 September 2023
- 12 December 2023 (AGM)
- 12 March 2024

SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE

Our staff are our primary asset and investing in the workforce is a key priority. This year we recruited two additional staff members including Clare Bailey, Interim Director and Oisin Fleming, who joined in October as a Project Support Officer for an Innovate UK funded project that Sustainable NI is delivering with Derry City and Strabane District Council to assist the council in understanding and managing Scope 3 emissions.

Staff training was provided throughout the year in support of professional development. This included:

- Training for Trustees in the Third Sector, CO3
- Interim Executive Training, CO3
- New to Post Chief Executive's Forum, CO3
- Managing Staff Training, NICVA
- ILM Level 3 Award in Leadership and Management, NW Regional College
- Carbon Literacy Facilitator Training

GROWING RESILIENCE

Dormant Accounts NI funding received in year has helped strengthen financial resilience in the organisation. The project aims were to strengthen the business plan, increase memberships and identify new revenue streams through a review of branding, and the development of new tools and services.

Working with marketing experts we updated our logo and brand identity. We also developed a new website. We reviewed key services and developed a suite of training courses to strengthen our consultancy offering and attract new clients. We also trained our staff in Carbon Literacy, meaning we are now licensed to facilitate Carbon Literacy Training under the Carbon Literacy Project.

Dormant Accounts NI funding was also used to support the development of a new digital tool to help public bodies screen their projects and decisions for environmental and social impacts.

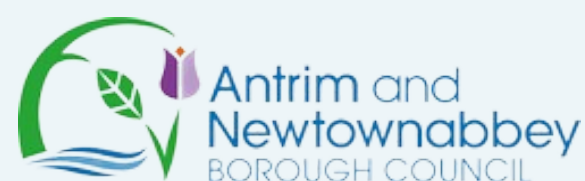
The tool will help public bodies comply with new Public Body Reporting Duties, introduced as part of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

To assist us with the tool's development, we received mentoring and support through the Digital Surge Programme which supports businesses deemed to have digital transformation potential.

A web-based app has now been designed and will be launched early next year. We believe the tool will help Sustainable NI grow its membership and help retain existing members.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to place on record our gratitude to all the organisations and individuals who continue to support the work of the organisation. Our work would not be possible without the support of our clients and funders. We also want to thank the many volunteers who freely give their time to help the charity. Funders this year were:



Delivered by
THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
COMMUNITY FUND



9 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Extracted Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31 March 2024

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

Sustainable Northern Ireland Statement of Financial Activities (including Income and Expenditure Account) for the year ended 31st March 2024

	Notes	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted funds £	Totals 2024 £	Totals 2023 £
Income					
<i>from donations and legacies</i>					
• Donations	3	-	-	0	-
• Grants	3	72,449	-	72,449	78,000
<i>from charitable activities</i>					
• Business income and sponsorship	3	21,050	-	21,050	16,250
• Other sources	3	60,000	-	60,000	60,000
<i>from other activities</i>					
• Investment income	3	459	-	459	356
Total income		153,958	0	153,958	154,606
Expenditure					
<i>on raising funds</i>					
• Promotional costs	4	179	-	179	4,434
<i>on charitable activities</i>					
• Employee costs	4	143,898	-	143,898	120,829
• Premises costs	4	5,474	-	5,474	7,531
• Travel & training costs	4	1,319	-	1,319	3,129
• General administration costs	4	21,899	-	21,899	7,998
• Programme costs	4	1,166	-	1,166	1,682
<i>On other items</i>					
• Legal & professional fees	4	9,625	-	9,625	3,551
• Other expenses	4	742	-	742	1,372
• Depreciation of assets	4	-	-	0	-
Total expenditure		184,302	0	184,302	150,526
Net income / (expenditure) for the year		(30,344)	0	(30,344)	4,080
Transfers between funds	10	-	-	0	-
Net movement in funds for the year		(30,344)	0	(30,344)	4,080
<i>Reconciliation of funds</i>					
• Fund balances brought fwd at 1st April		75,973	-	75,973	71,893
• Fund balances carried fwd at 31st March		45,629	0	45,629	75,973

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

9 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2024

The financial statements were approved by the Board of Directors on 10 December 2024 and signed on their behalf by:

Dr Rachael Singleton
Chair of Directors

Keith Patterson
Treasurer

Sustainable Northern Ireland Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet) as at 31st March 2024

	Notes	2024 £	2023 £
Fixed Assets			
• Tangible assets	11	-	-
		0	0
Current Assets			
• Receivables	12	2,130	756
• Cash at bank and in hand		59,888	79,784
		62,018	80,540
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	13	(16,389)	(4,567)
Net current assets		45,629	75,973
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		45,629	75,973
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year		-	-
Net assets		45,629	75,973
The funds of the charity			
<i>Unrestricted income funds:</i>			
• General funds	16	45,629	75,973
		45,629	75,973
<i>Restricted income funds:</i>			
• Single Use Plastic (SUP) Project	16	-	-
• Environmental Fund	16	-	-
Total funds		45,629	75,973



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