

Sustainable Development Guidance

Sustainable development is a concept that seeks to create a situation where humans are living within the constraints imposed by their environment but are also progressing to increased levels of welfare. To achieve this it is necessary to consider the environmental, social and economic aspects of each decision taken at every level. This means considering sustainable development in choices ranging from individual consumers' purchases to regional planning policy and national strategies.

The first NI Programme for Government (2001 – 2004) set out the vision for the future society of Northern Ireland, including a proactive commitment by the NI Executive to sustainable development, indicating that this “..will be a key theme running through our work and priorities”. This commitment has been strongly reiterated in subsequent updates of the Programme for Government and further in the proposal for development of a full sustainable development strategy for Northern Ireland during 2003. Embedding the concept of sustainable development will help to ensure that all policies and actions embody the integration of social, economic and environmental objectives in a way that leads to the greatest gains in the quality of life for all the people of NI. The desire for the fulfilment of current and future needs can be achieved through the simultaneous pursuit of the 4 proposed key objectives for sustainable development:

- Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone
- Effective protection of the environment
- Prudent use of natural resources
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment

These objectives are underpinned by 10 headline guiding principles, that assist policy makers and implementers in their approach to the development and application of optimal policy solutions. The guiding principles are:-

Putting people at the centre. Sustainable development must enable people to enjoy a better quality of life, now and in the future. In the words of the *Rio Declaration*, made at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, or Earth Summit) in 1992, “human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature”.

Taking a long term perspective. Sustainable development thinking cannot restrict itself to the life of a Parliament, or the next decade. Radical improvements have to begin now to safeguard the interests of future generations. At the same time we must meet today's needs - for example, people need warm homes, which, at present, means using predominantly fossil fuels.

Taking account of costs and benefits. Decisions must take account of a wide range of costs and benefits, including those which cannot easily be valued in money terms. In pursuing any single objective, we should not impose disproportionate costs elsewhere. Public values, the timing of costs and benefits and risks and uncertainties should be taken into account.

Creating an open and supportive economic system. Sustainable development requires a global economic system which supports economic growth in all countries. We need to create conditions in which trade can flourish and competitiveness can act as a stimulus for growth and greater resource efficiency.

Combating poverty and social exclusion. Eradicating poverty is indispensable for sustainable development. We must help developing countries to tackle widespread abject poverty. In this country, everyone should have the opportunity to fulfil their potential, through access to high quality public services, education and employment opportunities, decent housing and good local environments.

Respecting environmental limits. Serious or irreversible damage to some aspects of the environment and resources would pose a severe threat to global society. Examples are major climate change, overuse of freshwater resources, or collapse of globally significant fish stocks. In these cases, there are likely to be limits which should not be breached. Defining such limits is difficult, so precautionary action needs to be considered.

The precautionary principle. The *Rio Declaration* defines the precautionary principle as “where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation”. Precautionary action requires assessment of the costs and benefits of action, and transparency in decision-making.

Using scientific knowledge. When taking decisions, it is important to anticipate early on where scientific advice or research is needed, and to identify sources of information of high calibre. Where possible, evidence should be reviewed from a wide-ranging set of viewpoints.

Transparency, information, participation and access to justice. Opportunities for access to information, participation in decision-making, and access to justice should be available to all.

Making the polluter pay. Much environmental pollution, resource depletion and social cost occurs because those responsible are not those who bear the consequence. If the polluter, or ultimately the consumer, is made to pay for those costs, that gives incentives to reduce harm, and means that costs do not fall on society at large. At the same time, it may not always be possible for everyone to bear all such costs, particularly for essential goods and services.

The measurement of how these principles have been applied in practice, forms the platform for assessment of individual policies’ contribution to the embedding of sustainable development throughout government in NI. The current “Promoting Sustainable Living - A Discussion Paper on Proposals for a Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland” can be accessed on http://www.ehsni.gov.uk/pubs/publications/Promoting_Sustainable_Living.pdf

Guidance to considerations for the sustainable development element of the Integrated Impact Assessment

The following headline questions within part 4 of the Integrated Impact Assessment, cover all aspects and principles of the concept of Sustainable Development, in its entirety. The guidance provided here gives more detailed considerations (illustrations of sustainable behaviour) for each headline question, in order to enable policy makers to make an informed judgement as to how much more “sustainable” a proposed policy could be. These considerations are not exhaustive and may repeat other aspects of the Integrated Impact Assessment and headline questions, however they provide clear markers to enable the headline questions to be sufficiently assessed.

Further dimensions

In the widest considerations of “*Sustainable development as a concept that seeks to create a situation where humans are living within the constraints imposed by their environment but are also progressing to increased levels of welfare*”, it is essential that account is taken of the global and inter-generational effects of actions and decisions made by this generation’s policy makers in this part of the Northern Hemisphere. The following considerations are considered important for increasing the depth of understanding of the sustainable development concept, but are not strictly within the parameters of consideration by NI policy makers and therefore have not been included in the Integrated Impact Assessment.

Poverty in the Southern Hemisphere, compared to wealth of the Northern Hemisphere

The development or implementation of policy should ultimately contribute to increasing equity and equality in the standards of living for the majority of the people of the world. The UNCED stated that“everyone shall co-operate in the task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world”.

Current Needs

Policies are by their very development an answer to the needs of current and future generations within this region. Care must be taken to ensure that there is a fair balance between environmental, economic and social considerations, within the context of particular policy interventions.

Peace

A key foundation to the sustainability of Northern Ireland now and in the future is the embedding of peace and reconciliation within and between all communities in our society. Some of the interventions that lead to the building of this foundation could be -

- Targeting or benefiting an area showing the effects of conflict or community polarisation
- Providing opportunities to build on peace and promote a stable and normal society
- Targeting a sector adversely affected by conflict and division or experiencing structural adjustment
- Benefiting communities economically or otherwise disadvantaged by the conflict
- Developing reconciliation and mutual understanding between or within communities and traditions

An overview of Sustainable Development in NI can be accessed on www.sniponline.org.

Table 1

Question 2	Will it result in a change in the choice available to consumers, or the availability of information to enable them to exercise choice?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assisting in technology and information transfer to local firms and communities ▪ Maximising the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
Question 3	Does the policy enhance the region's infrastructure, including maximising transport choice and exploiting opportunities offered by information technology?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encouraging a reduction in travel ▪ Encouraging the use of public and community transport by the location of infrastructure ▪ Promoting eco-friendly transport options and improving conditions and facilities for pedestrians and cyclists ▪ Discouraging the use of private cars and lorries ▪ Accessibility to those without cars and who live in outlying/peripheral areas ▪ Promoting alternative fuel technology ▪ Making full use of information technology ▪ Using the global ICT revolution to create the ability for everyone to use information and knowledge to maximum benefit ▪ Making full use of existing infrastructure capacity
Question 5	Does the policy take sufficient account of unique regional characteristics, other policies within the region and policies in the ROI and other parts of the UK?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflecting local distinctiveness and cultural diversity, including built, landscape, demographic factors (eg a young but ageing population), and other cultural and community identity effects. ▪ Furthering the bringing together of inter-departmental objectives ▪ Taking into sufficient account different policies in ROI or other parts of the UK ▪ Complementing work and facilities with adjacent regions
Question 6	Will the policy impose or relieve a cost or burden on business, charities or the voluntary sector?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Having supply chain links with local companies and sources of raw materials etc. ▪ Linking local production and local consumption – eg encouraging the local and organic production of food ▪ Complementing existing local businesses ▪ Increasing local capacity for innovation and R&D or access to credit or capital for local business ▪ Giving a commitment to use local labour ▪ Providing accessible secure jobs to local unemployed people and other disadvantaged groups including being accessible in terms of location/transport/childcare/skills/fulfilling of local needs
Question 7	Will it result in a change in the investment in people, equipment, infrastructure, or other asset?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assisting local businesses in achieving the implementation of good social and environmental management and policies ▪ Enhancing the knowledge of environmental issues or encouraging local environmental action ▪ Valuing learning and a learning industry to enable the workforce to become one of the most adaptable, motivated and highly skilled in Europe ▪ Having positive impacts on local quality of life
Question 8	Will the policy develop a strong culture of enterprise and innovation?
Examples of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing a positive demonstrator effect to local businesses

sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inspiring leading edge research ▪ Assisting in the production/marketing of distinctive local products and foods ▪ Strengthen the local economy through business linkages and locally tailored business ▪ Assisting in creating opportunities for using cleaner technologies and processes ▪ Creating a “learning region”, giving the region a competitive edge in how we acquire and exploit knowledge
Question 9	Will the policy promote indigenous growth and the development of the social economy?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encouraging diversification of the economic base both in rural and urban areas ▪ Helping local and community based businesses to set up and grow ▪ Encouraging local organisations to engage in activity that has social, economic or environmental benefit ▪ Encouraging local initiatives such as employment advice, training volunteering or support services ▪ Helping non-trading organisations providing local services on a not-for-profit basis
Question 21	Will the policy enhance the level of skills and education, in the workforce, among children or otherwise?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contributing to the delivery of a range of life-long learning opportunities for all parts of the community ▪ Improving access to opportunities for education/learning and skills and training opportunities for all ▪ Attracting and retaining talent in the region ▪ Enabling people to have a greater say in building their future ▪ Helping to improve education/training/skills standards and facilities and opportunities for all in schools, colleges, training institutions and universities ▪ Helping to meet local skill and employment needs ▪ Encouraging excellence in the approach to learning and skills
Question 22	Will it affect access to, and the range of, facilities for the arts, culture, sports and leisure pursuits?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing accessible and affordable sporting and leisure facilities and opportunities ▪ Increasing access, enjoyment and participation in arts, local culture and heritage ▪ Promoting and building on local cultural diversity
Question 23	Will the policy or project affect the number of people involved in voluntary and community activities?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving voluntary and community infrastructure ▪ Contributing to building community capacity and facilitating community empowerment ▪ Encouraging responsible behaviour by local people or raising awareness of issues, rights or opportunities ▪ Promoting community viability and cohesion ▪ Strengthening and developing neighbourhood and community support networks
Question 24	Will it affect people’s access to information or social networks?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving access, facilities and opportunities for disabled people ▪ Improving access, facilities and opportunities for children and young people
Question 25	Will the policy ensure that the housing stock meets the housing needs of all parts of the community?

Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tackling homelessness ▪ Responding to other priority housing needs ▪ Improving the quality or upkeep of the current housing stock ▪ Ensuring access to good quality and safe housing affordable to all sections of the community ▪ Improving the housing conditions of households
Question 26	Will the policy promote user and community involvement in policy development and service delivery?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving opportunities for volunteering, particularly amongst those people least likely to participate ▪ Improving opportunities for participation in local action and decision making ▪ Countering discrimination and disadvantage experienced by different user groups and community members ▪ Promoting best practice through joined-up action ▪ Supporting community empowerment and maximising opportunities for excluded groups to be involved ▪ Seeking local community participation in policy development stages ▪ Offering fully accessible buildings and services ▪ Taking account of anti-discrimination legislation ▪ Taking account of under represented groups ▪ Supporting local community projects and facilities and local capacity building schemes (eg community plans and Local Agenda 21 activity) ▪ Empowering communities to create solutions to meet their needs ▪ Involving local regeneration partnerships ▪ Maximising the use of existing local skills ▪ Reducing poverty, low pay and deprivation
Question 27	Will the policy maintain or increase the choices available to future generations to meet their needs?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applying the precautionary principle ▪ Providing for the needs of future generations ▪ Maintaining or increasing the environmental quality/capacity and social equity available to future generations ▪ Will the policy introduce a new technology or process that will make existing goods redundant over time?
Questions 28 and 30	Will the policy have an impact on diet; physical activity; safe sex; substance use (alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs)? Will the policy affect the wider determinants of health such as crime; education; employment, including workplace; family cohesion; housing; income; recreation; social cohesion; transport?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<p>Promoting, supporting and sustaining healthy communities and lifestyles – in particular through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving access to and quality of affordable facilities and information that promote physical, social and mental health and well being with a focus on individuals and communities that experience the poorest health ▪ Addressing the causes of and factors that contribute to poor health – eg poverty, poor environment, unemployment, lifestyle etc.. ▪ Reducing health inequalities
Question 41	Does the policy contribute to the protection/conservation and management of the natural and built environmental assets of the region?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conserving, managing and enhancing local built and cultural heritage ▪ Conserving and enhancing the historic environment ▪ Protecting and enhancing the region's biodiversity ▪ Restoring the region's wildlife habitats ▪ Minimising any environmental dis-benefits ▪ Promoting environmental stewardship of the countryside ▪ Minimising noise or light pollution ▪ Minimising damage to the best agricultural land, soils and geology

Question 42	Does the policy enhance and improve the environmental quality of the region including high standards of design?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Making a positive contribution to the built environment, protecting and enhancing local distinctiveness and diversity ▪ Enhancing landscape quality, especially historic landscapes
Question 44	Does the policy maximise the re-use of previously used land?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reusing brownfield sites or vacant buildings ▪ Assisting programmes for the restoration of derelict land, the decontamination of land and the regeneration of areas
Question 45	Does the policy ensure that decisions about the distribution and location of activity are consistent with sustainable development principles?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<p>The key sustainable development objectives are:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone ▪ Effective protection of the environment ▪ Prudent use of natural resources ▪ Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment <p>Further guidance on these is contained in the document “Promoting Sustainable Living - A Discussion Paper on Proposals for a Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland”</p> <p>The importance in looking at the balance of each objective is not merely the contribution of particular policies to each of these objectives in themselves, but in consideration of the inter effects of these objectives against each other.</p> <p>Policy contributions to the objectives can be demonstrated through a combination of all the types of actions described in this sustainable development guidance and manifest in particular types of behaviours such as -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minimising journey distances in order to effect policy ▪ Assisting in ensuring that housing areas are in easy walking distances of schools, community facilities, leisure and public transport ▪ Protecting and enhancing the quality of valued open green spaces and ensuring that new open space areas are safe and accessible to all the community ▪ Protecting and enhancing the vitality and viability of towns and villages ▪ Ensuring that developments do not increase flooding or coastal erosion ▪ Developing a diverse rural economy which provides a broad base of employment ▪ Enabling agriculture to deliver economic, environmental and social benefits
Question 46	How does the policy safeguard natural, non-renewable resources, reduce the need for example of minerals and promote the reuse of primary resources.
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minimising resource use including minerals and waste and maximising the life span of buildings etc. ▪ Promoting the reuse of primary resources ▪ Reducing the local pollution of land ▪ Preventing other types of pollution
Question 47	Will it affect the efficient use of energy or water?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Protecting and improving water quality and the conservation of water resources ▪ Reducing the need for water ▪ Promoting the reuse of water ▪ Reducing the waste of energy, while promoting the use of energy from renewable sources ▪ Reducing energy use and wastage through efficiency and design ▪ Promoting the use of renewable sources of energy (or combined heat and power)

Question 48	Will the policy seek to minimise waste and encourage re-use and recycling of waste materials?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assisting individuals and firms in minimising, recycling and reusing of waste and avoiding unnecessary resource use ▪ Taking into account environmental considerations when purchasing materials or contracts ▪ Ensuring that purchasing considers the energy and raw materials used to produce materials required to implement the policy ▪ Taking into account the pollution and environmental damage caused by obtaining raw materials, manufacturing products, ability to reuse/recycle materials and eventual disposal of products ▪ Ensuring that packaging material causes least environmental impacts from its disposal ▪ Improving the environmental impact and performance of local business ▪ Improving the environmental awareness of local business
Questions 67-69	Will the policy affect the rate of violent and non-violent crimes? Will it divert people away from or prevent crime? Will it affect people's fears about being a victim of crime?
Examples of sustainable behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creating the commitment to and co-ordination of action to secure community safety and reduce crime ▪ Reducing the occurrence of crime by maximising security ▪ Ensuring developments maximise community safety