

# IMPACT REPORT

2023

**Sustainable**  
Northern Ireland



## BEHIND THE COVER

The image on the cover carries a strong message: we're putting too much pressure on our planet, and the metaphorical dam is about to break. We are currently overshooting five of the nine boundaries crucial to the health of our planet—continuing along this path will mean putting people and the planet increasingly in harm's way. Through a circular net zero economy, we can relieve these pressures, bringing humanity back within a safe operating space.



We 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 do this by providing information, advice and support to help individuals and organisations become more sustainable.

Our vision is a fair, green economy that operates within planetary boundaries.



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**RACHAEL SINGLETON**  
Behavioural scientist at the  
NI Innovation Lab



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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

TEAM  
MEMBERS

**NICHOLA HUGHES**  
Executive Director



Known for her tenacity and unwavering 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. Nichola is very proud to say she loves her job.

**CLARE BAILEY**  
Interim 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.

**AIDEEN NOLAN**  
Student / Volunteer



Aideen is currently in her third year studying Geography at Ulster University. A placement student within Sustainable NI, she is passionate about sustainability and climate change and is excited to pursue her future career in this field.

**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.



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# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**In this Impact 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 2022-23 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. With support from Dormant Accounts Fund NI, we've been working on becoming more resilient and prepared for the future by pursuing activities that will increase our own capacity and sustainability to better support the transition to a green, net zero economy. With this goal in mind, our Board and Team carried out a strategic review of Sustainable NI's brand identity, mission, aims, services and values. The outcomes fed into a new operational plan and a new website which is due to launch in 2023. A new strategy will be published in 2024.

This year we added two new members to our team and with additional capacity, we have been able to do more. Highlights this year include supporting the development of critical government regulations and policies such as the Energy 'One Stop Shop' Implementation Plan, Circular Economy Strategy and Public Body Reporting Duty. We're also looking forward to shaping the NI Climate Action Plan, due for consultation this summer.

In continuing to facilitate the All Party Group on Climate Action despite the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, we have made sure that climate action remains a political priority for our politicians so that they can take decisive action when back in government.

Our staff continue to perform exceptionally well, with a marked increase in educational outreach and support work this year. The Sustainable Development Forum continues to function as critical support for local government and public bodies to lead transformative change and measurable climate action across the region.

Due to the lifting of lockdown restrictions, we have been able to get out to more events and reach a wider audience than ever before. From engaging with local chambers of commerce to school events, we continue to challenge thinking and raise awareness of the need to be more sustainable and how to achieve it.

We have looked at options to help diversify and grow funding, including through direct service provision, for example by expanding our portfolio of training courses. This year we introduced two new courses: Sustainable Design & Construction (for those working on capital projects and public realm schemes) and Carbon Literacy Training for interested organisations. We hope to promote these next year.

We continue to offer sustainability audits for businesses and organisations looking to establish a baseline to measure and evaluate progress on sustainability as well as carbon footprinting services. We see this as a key area of growth. We also want to do more to support the third sector. We have been successful in receiving funding to coordinate a regional green clubs programme in 2023-24, in partnership with Ulster GAA, which we are optimistic will evolve into broader support for sustainability and climate action in the third sector.

All of this activity exists in the context of a rapidly escalating climate and ecological crisis. Northern Ireland must achieve net zero carbon 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. Sustainable NI recognises that rising greenhouse gas emissions can be attributed to consumption. In fact, around 70% of global GHG emissions are linked to material handling and use. It's no coincidence that we are currently transgressing five of nine planetary boundaries that are crucial to planetary health: climate change, biodiversity loss, land system change, chemical pollution, and cycles of nitrogen and phosphorus. Clearly, our relationship with materials requires change. Increasing education and awareness about our consumption habits, and the toll it is taking on the planet and humanity, will be the focus of our work next year.

As we enter 2023-24, we will prioritise our resources to support and guide public, private and third-sector organisations to push the boundaries on climate action. With a Climate Change Act now in place, it is an opportune time for Sustainable NI 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.



## 2 IMPACT SUMMARY

### Deliverables this year:



2

BUSINESS AUDITS



6

CONSULTATION  
RESPONSES



1,745

PEOPLE TRAINED



5

STRATEGIES &  
ACTION PLANS



26

WORKSHOPS  
OR EVENTS



15

LEARNING  
RESOURCES

1,745

People trained

11,000

Visitors on our website





# 3 OUR GOALS

Our purpose is to promote a more sustainable way of living and working in order 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

Campaign 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 2022-23 these included:

## DISSEMINATING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

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

- Bimonthly digital newsletter (reaching 600 people)
- Social media (reaching 1500 people)
- Website (reaching 9,700 people)

Resources developed this year:

- Lámh Dhearg GAA Case Study - a Green Sports Club
- Springfield Meadows Case Study - a Net Zero Passivhaus Development
- Mahon Point Case Study - Ireland's Greenest Shopping Centre
- One Planet Mind Case Study - a Sustainable Clothing Brand
- South West College Case Study - a Passivhaus Premium Building
- 10 Blogs/Articles for the website
- Survey/Report on sustainability in the Third Sector in Northern Ireland
- Briefing note on the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act

Talks and presentations this year:

- Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Climate Change Working Group
- Mid Ulster District Council Climate Change Working Group
- Belfast Citizen Jury
- GAA, IFA and Ulster Rugby Green Clubs Webinar
- FinTru Lunch and Learn
- Energy Manager's Forum
- Lisburn Chamber of Commerce Seminar
- SW College Sustainable Future Conference
- NI Retail Consortium Conference
- NI Manufacturing & Supply Chain Conference
- NI Economic Development Conference

## PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY AND DIVERSE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

We developed the following training courses this year:

- Sustainable Design & Construction for Capital Projects
- Becoming a Sustainable Business (received by businesses in Ards and North Down)
- Developing a Climate Action Plan (received by Mid Ulster District Council; Mid and East Antrim Borough Council)

## PROVIDING THE SECRETARIAT FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FORUM

The mission of the Forum is to coordinate and support local government and public bodies to lead transformative change and measurable climate action across the region. It connects, informs and inspires sustainable changemakers to turn ideas into action and collaborate on shared objectives.

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 five meetings/events of the Forum were held:

- 16 June 2022 (Belfast)
- 16 September 2022 (Enniskillen)
- 23 November 2022 (Virtual)
- 14 December 2022 (Webinar)
- 8 March 2023 (Virtual)

Local authorities occupy a pivotal role in the transition to net zero by demonstrating public sector leadership on climate action in their local areas as well as becoming key mobilisers of behaviour change at a community level. To capture current activity in the sector, we conducted a survey on climate action taken by local authorities in Northern Ireland. The findings will feature on our new website, due to launch later this year.





**We advocate for ambitious legislative and regulatory change in support of our mission through our policy and advocacy work. In 2022-23 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 meeting our net zero aspirations, including:

- Energy 'One Stop Shop' Implementation Plan
- Review of permitted development rights to protect the environment and help address climate change
- Circular Economy Strategy

In addition to providing written consultation responses, we participated in several government forums and committees to help shape policy and investment in the area of energy and environment:

- NI Affairs Committee Inquiry into Investment in Northern Ireland (Sustainable and gender-equitable investment)
- NI Government Green Growth Forum (Climate Change Reporting Regulations)
- NI Advisory Group on non-household recycling provisions

In May 2022 we launched a manifesto for the Northern Ireland Assembly Elections. 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 All Party Group on Climate Action. Membership is cross-party and includes representatives from the NI Assembly as well as NI councils. The Chair is Kate Nicholl MLA.

For the 250+ 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 2022-23, including:

- 22 June 2022 (AGM)
- 21 September 2022
- 16 November 2022
- 25 January 2023
- 22 March 2023

A range of issues, projects and campaigns were discussed from sustainable food growing (Acorn Farm), fuel poverty and cost of living, green hydrogen, energy policy & strategy, the office for environmental protection, expansion of rail infrastructure and local authority climate action (Belfast City Council).

## PRIORITIES IN THE SUSTAINABLE NI MANIFESTO FOR ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 2022:

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, reporting, training, workshops and communications support.**

### STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS

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

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

In most of these organisations, we delivered workshops to co-design the strategies with staff and decision-makers.

### SUSTAINABILITY AUDITS AND REPORTS

Our Sustainability Audit analyses and 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 local businesses:

- Castle Mall, Antrim
- Mercury Security, Lisburn

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, supporting innovation and providing additional momentum to get things done. Existing partnerships include the Sustainable Development Forum; the Circular Economy Coalition which has been collectively working on developing a Circular Economy Strategy for Northern Ireland; and the Northern Ireland EV Consortium which was successful in securing £1,348,370 this year for new residential EV charging infrastructure.

Additionally, we became a partner in the Green Clubs Programme. Led by the GAA, the programme is structured around the themes of Energy, Water, Waste, Biodiversity and Travel & Transport and is designed to promote sustainability awareness and action in GAA clubs and communities. We supported the development of the Green Clubs Toolkit and delivered a webinar called 'Clubs Going Green' in September 2022.

## SUSTAINABILITY SOLUTIONS FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES & ORGANISATIONS

Many businesses have already recognised that a sustainable business strategy brings them a competitive advantage. By lowering operating costs and improving brand appeal, sustainability can lead to increased profits. It can also help reduce risk, from energy price volatility to supply chain failures. However, sustainability can be a complex business. To help organisations make continual progress and demonstrate impact, have a team of experts who can

help by providing advice, workshops and bespoke planning to help organisations on their sustainability journey. Our advisory services are available for private, public and voluntary sector organisations, with content and delivery tailored according to the client's needs and focus areas. Our services have been designed around a suggested approach to delivering sustainability, which embraces four themes:

#### 1. DEVELOP A VISION FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND EMBED IT INTO STRATEGY

A good strategic vision looks beyond the lifetime of whoever creates it and focuses on joined-up thinking to ensure services and operations are designed with environmental, social and economic objectives in mind. Our strategy workshops and action planning sessions help you see the big picture and deliver a bold strategy fit for the future.

#### 2. MEASURE PERFORMANCE THROUGH ROBUST METRICS AND REPORTING

Metrics are key to ensuring you deliver on your climate and sustainability promises. We help organisations select the most relevant KPIs, allowing them to track progress on sustainability where it matters most. We can also review your carbon footprint, making recommendations on how to reduce emissions and improve reporting procedures.

#### 3. USE COMMUNICATION TOOLS TO CONVINCE CORE STAKEHOLDERS

By definition, sustainability requires extensive collaboration among internal and external stakeholders. We provide a range of tools to successfully involve and engage your stakeholders. From campaign materials to staff inductions, we know how to convince your board, staff, investors and customers of the value of your sustainability strategy.

#### 4. STRENGTHEN CAPACITY & SKILLS TO REALISE YOUR VISION

Sustainability is everyone's business. From the CEO to Grounds Maintenance, we can empower your team to become change makers, providing tips to overcome challenges on the road to sustainability. The training courses we offer are highly customisable and are aligned to the stages of your sustainable transformation.



## 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 three board members and welcomed five new board members. Resignations included: Aoife Foley, Nuala Flood and Andrew Cassells. New board members included: Keith Patterson, Rachael Singleton, Robert Clements, Andrew Benfield and Jac Callan. All Trustees received governance training and completed a skills assessment. Four board meetings took place this year, including the AGM on 6 December 2022,

### 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 the Head of Advisory Services (April) and the Interim Director (March). We hosted one placement student (September to March). Staff training was provided in support of skills development and we carried out a staff engagement survey over the summer which resulted in a review of and subsequent increase in staff pay. We also reviewed our policies and benefits to ensure they promote employee well-being and support equality. This resulted in several new policies such as incremental annual leave in recognition of long service, well-being leave provisions and a career break policy.

### GROWING RESILIENCE

The Dormant Accounts NI funding received this year provided Sustainable NI with an opportunity to strengthen resilience in the organisation. With grant support received over two years, 2022-23 & 2023-24, the aim of the project is to strengthen the business plan, making the charity less reliant on income from one source and instead diversify revenue, strengthening existing income and fundraising for new resources.

We used some of the funding to carry out a review of our brand identity, working with a graphic design house to update our logo, values and marketing materials including a new website. The website was built in 2022-23 and will be launched in the summer. As well as a brand review, we reviewed our key services and developed a suite of new training courses to cater for a range of client needs which will provide a future source of income as part of our Advisory Services. We also used the funding to carry out a review of sustainability in the Third Sector, to build a stronger case for funding.

We have also been working on a web-based decision tool for councils and public bodies to clearly show the environmental and social implications of proposed decisions. The tool is based on 'Donut Economics' which is a visual framework for sustainable development. The aim is to make the screening assessment mandatory across public sector decision-making processes; challenging strategies, procurement and investment decisions. The tool will help public bodies satisfy the requirements of the Sustainable Development Statutory Duty (2007) and indirectly will support Public Body Reporting Duties under the Climate Change Act (2022).

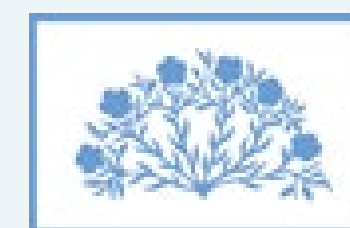
As the output is a digital solution we received expert mentoring and support through the Digital Surge Programme. The Digital Surge Programme is a NI-wide programme that is part-funded by all 11 local authorities. It supports businesses that are deemed to have digital transformation potential. We will be ready to proceed with app development in the summer, and the project is due to be completed in 2023-24.

# 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:



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