

Landscape Institute Northern Ireland

Sustainable Development Strategy – Public Consultation: everyone’s involved.
Consultation Paper by Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)
Response of the **Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch (LINI)**
15 January 2010

The **Landscape Institute** is the chartered institute in the United Kingdom for landscape architects, incorporating designers, managers, and scientists, concerned with conserving and enhancing the environment. The Landscape Institute promotes the highest standards in the practice of landscape planning, design, management and research, and represents members in private practice, at all levels of government and government agencies, in academic institutions and in commercial organisations.

The Landscape Institute is an educational charity and chartered body whose purpose is to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public. It champions well-designed and well-managed urban and rural landscape. The Landscape Institute’s accreditation and professional procedures ensure that the designers, managers and scientists who make up the landscape architecture profession work to the highest standards. Its advocacy and education programmes promote the landscape architecture profession as one which focuses on design, environment and community in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit. The Landscape Institute is committed to the principles of sustainable development by improving the quality of design of urban and rural environments and to the protection and enhancement of our physical and natural environments.

The **Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch (LINI)** represents the professional membership within Northern Ireland and is particularly concerned with design, management and planning for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland.

LINI welcomes the opportunity to consider ‘*Everyone’s involved*’, the public consultation on Sustainable Development Strategy, and submits the following response.

A vision for the successful and valuable progression of both society and environment in Northern Ireland:

Regarding the Vision Statement, LINI requests that this is more concisely framed specific to the parameters of sustainable development. LINI advises that environment (the ‘natural’ land) in the presence of society (man) leads to the creation of our landscape, our lifestyle, and our identity. The identity (quality, value, durability and sustainability) of that lifestyle (and landscape) depends on the manner of integration between environment and society, and for the success of both, it is not possible to consider them in separation. Therefore, LINI suggests that the Vision Statement for the Enabling Strategy must be for the successful and valuable progression of both society and environment in Northern Ireland. LINI advises that to seek for this society to be peaceful, fair and prosperous is actually outwith the remit of an enabling document for sustainable development.

The statement on p25 should be forefront: ‘We are making a commitment to, and setting an agenda for, an open and participatory environment in which everyone can [we hope ‘will’] contribute to the achievement of our collective ambitions’[... for the successful and valuable progression of both society and environment in Northern Ireland]. That the outcome is SHARED is an important precept.

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Question 1: Is the draft Sustainable Development Strategy an enabling document which paves the way for an Implementation plan containing specific plans and targets in support of sustainable development?

LINI commends the ambition for a high-level enabling document, and agrees that it is essential that sustainability thinking is embedded in all governance, public and individual matters.

For that, it is important that the Sustainable Development strategy is not seen as a separate document, but rather one which requires Sustainability Thinking in all other government departments. If Sustainability Thinking is embedded in the Programme for Government, and thus into all governance procedures, then maybe a specific Sustainable Development strategy would no longer be required...!

In this Enabling Document, it is essential that the aims and objectives are clearly stated. These aims must be justified, and according to justified Guiding Principles, actions must be indicated for government to achieve public commitment and enactment according to these aims. LINI does not feel these matters are sufficiently evident. The Enabling Document must depend on them.

LINI commends the title of the strategy: 'Everyone's Involved'. Public commitment and enactment according to the aims of the strategy are essential in order to attain the stated two overarching aims of Sustainable Development for (1) validity and (2) stability. LINI attests that it is essential to recognise this, as LINI believes that a change in behaviour through evolution of attitude towards mutually-beneficial environmental and societal well-being will cause the greatest advantage with regard to sustainable progression of our planet.

LINI attests that sustainable development is valued environmental design that assures environmental capacity and serves society. LINI thus believes the two essential strands of Sustainable Development must be primarily environment and society (as stated in the Guiding Principles on p11, and also on p3 of the consultation document), whereby whilst environmental resources must be protected and enhanced, this must also support well-being and encourage reciprocal commitment to the environment for that well-being.

Question 2: Will the draft Sustainable Development Strategy effectively link high-level objectives to delivery of plans?

An overall objective of the Enabling Document must be to ensure that all government strategies, policies, procedures, programmes and actions for all other purposes are sustainably valid. LINI suggests that the term 'Sustainable Development' be replaced by 'Sustainability Thinking' in all cases, so that 'sustainability thinking' is not considered solely as a built environment matter, but is considered in all aspects of societal progression.

LINI commends the strategy for its commitment to develop and instil 'sustainability thinking' through all government and public, which is essential for consistency for sustainable development in both government and public policy and undertakings.

The Implementation Action Plan of the Enabling Document is not presented. This Implementation Plan must indicate the actions required by government departments (and members of the public) to embed Sustainability Thinking in all of their procedures.

LINI concurs that to attain a sustainable society and environment, government policies and actions must incentivise rather than inhibit Sustainability Thinking in all instances.

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It is essential that all government matters are sustainability proofed, with equity and coherence in all areas.

Question 3: Do you agree with the Principles, Priorities and Strategic Objectives identified within the draft Sustainable Development Strategy?

LINI seeks clarification of the structure of the Enabling Document:

- Vision for successful and valuable progression of both society and environment in Northern Ireland
- Overall Aims and Objectives: validity and stability of sustainable progression
- Essential Strands in Sustainable Progression: Environment and Society
- Overarching Guiding Principles: Environment and Society
- Supportive Guiding Principles:
 - Economy - LINI concurs with the Consultation Document that (like governance, science and innovation) the economy, which is usually stated as the 3rd strand of sustainable development, is a means to serve the other two strands (environment and society), rather than actually being an aim in itself. This is clearly evident in the table on p11 of the consultation document.
 - Governance – to engage people’s creativity, energy and diversity in order to embed desire for sustainable living.
 - Science – looking at the holistic impact and position of proposals
 - Innovation - LINI advises that it is essential to acknowledge that the innovation may be ‘regressive’; a review of existing, and maybe a return to previous practices with advanced knowledge.
- Priorities: LINI seeks clarification: it is not explained how the Guiding principles and Priorities interact. LINI suggests an additional priority area, and the reordering of the Priority areas as follows:
 1. less energy (need to instil in society a desire to use less resources and reduce lifestyle consumption of energy)
 2. society
 3. alternative energy
 4. resources
 5. economy
 6. infrastructure
- Strategic Objectives: LINI comments that these are not the application of priorities to guiding principles as stated, but rather that these are just individual aspects of the priorities.
- The Implementation Plan to attain these Priorities and Strategic Objectives is not presented.

Question 4: Are the Commitments sufficient to make sure those inside and outside government contribute to the strategy?

LINI attests that the number of commitments could be significantly reduced and suggests their simplification, restatement, and prioritisation.

1. Commitment 1: LINI suggests that Commitment 1 of the Sustainable Development Strategy should be to ensure that the Programme for Government requires sustainability thinking and consistency in all areas. This would also encompass the content of Commitment 5. The Sustainability Proofing referred to in Commitment 1 would combine with the content of Commitment 11. LINI agrees that the programme for government must serve sustainability thinking more ambitiously each year.

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2. Commitment 2: for International Cooperation is essential, and can include the content of Commitment 3.
3. Commitment 3 (see 2 above)
4. Commitment 4: It is essential to attain cooperation throughout the members of the public, however not solely in terms of feedback regarding OFMDFM strategy (as stated), but more so because sustainable progression of environment and society cannot take place without a commitment to sustainability thinking throughout the general public. Commitment 13 + 14 + 4 should be combined as a single commitment for essential interaction and representation and feedback.
5. Commitment 5 is covered within the revised Commitment 1 suggested by LINI.
6. Commitment 6: should not just explore, but also define and direct the means by which capacity-building measures can be introduced. LINI suggests that staff training by default also includes policy training
7. Commitment 7: It is important to recognise that the mechanisms relate to the achievement of positive sustainable development outcomes by ALL (government, private sector, members of the public). This commitment should include the restatement of Section 25 for greater effectiveness.
8. Commitment 8: OK. LINI asks if the Implementation Plan was prepared as stated.
9. Commitment 9: This commitment is included within LINI revised Commitment 7.
10. Commitment 10: LINI suggests that policy training is encompassed within Commitment 6 for staff training.
11. Commitment 11: The review of all guidance to reflect requirement for overarching sustainability thinking is encompassed with the review of all policy also (stated in Commitment 1 – sustainability proofing), which may be brought together in this commitment). Regarding Sustainability Proofing of policy, LINI comments that ‘assist, encourage and secure’ is easier to understand than A (assimilate), B (broker), C (collaborate).
12. Commitment 12, 15, 16, 18 + 20 should be combined as a single commitment to communication.
13. Commitment 13 + 14 + 4 should be combined as a single commitment for essential interaction and representation and feedback.
17. Commitment 17: ok
19. Commitment 19: ok

Question 5: Do you agree with eths cope to the four broad key challenges for cross-cutting sectoral engagement?

1. Mainstreaming: LINI commends this Key Challenge, see response to Question 1 above.
2. Wider Public Sector: LINI contends that all ‘wider public sector’ bodies must be required to adhere to the Programme for Government. LINI states that the stated section 25 of the NI (MP) Act 2006 duty to ‘promote achievement of sustainable development’ is too weak, and requests that all government bodies be required instead to exercise their functions according to sustainability thinking, and that in fact the converse must be required: no duty should be permitted to be undertaken which compromises sustainability thinking (rather than no sustainability thinking being permitted to compromise the undertaking of their required activities). ie. sustainability thinking must be paramount.
3. Community and voluntary sector: With regard to sustainable communities, LINI believes these require belief in, and commitment to sustainability thinking for societal well-being. Then communities will work towards sustainable communities. All government matters must encourage and not inhibit belief gained from sustainable thinking.

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4. Private Sector: LINI advises that progress is a relative concept, not only achieved through economic prosperity, and advises that it is essential to consider the 'whole life' picture of economic development. See LINI comment relating to economy in Question 3 above.

Question 6: Does the draft Sustainable Development Strategy provide your organisation with sufficient information to facilitate the shaping of your own sustainable development plans?

LINI considers that there should be a definition of Sustainability Thinking, and an objective that all organisations must prove how Sustainability Thinking pervades all their practices.

Question 7: In addition to aligning with the Programme for Government and National and European indicators, what else should the Sustainable Development Strategy have regard to?

No comment.

Question 8: Does the draft Sustainable Development Strategy support the delivery of the executive's strategic priorities as expressed in the Programme for Government?

No comment

Question 9: are there any other issues in the Strategy that you wish to comment on?

No comment

[Produced for the Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch by Emily Hadden CMLI.]

The Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch would like to thank OFMDFM for the opportunity to contribute to the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy. For any queries and further discussion relating to this response, and for future consultations, please contact:

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