

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE LIVING



A Discussion Paper on Proposals for a Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland

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FOREWORD BY MINISTER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT, MR DERMOT NESBITT MLA



It is both timely and appropriate that this discussion document is being published just as countries throughout the world are preparing for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, later this year. This Summit will mark the 10th Anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Environment & Development [The Earth Summit] held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

There has been much important work going on across the UK ever since to follow up the commitment to sustainable development arising out of the Earth Summit. This has involved not only central and local government, but also the business sector and the community and voluntary sectors. The work in central government culminated in the publication of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, "A Better Quality of Life", in 1999. This established a vision for sustainable development in the UK of high and stable levels of economic growth, paralleled by social progress and respect for the environment. Moreover, the strategy recognised that Northern Ireland, along with the other devolved administrations, has the opportunity to develop policies for sustainable development, which reflect our institutions, landscape, culture and way of life.

In response to the UK strategy, the Northern Ireland Executive has endorsed the integrated social, economic and environmental objectives of sustainable development and the principles that underpin them. In the Programme for Government we have adopted sustainable development as a key cross-cutting theme - one that underpins every one of our priorities and runs through our work. We have set out a vision of a dynamic, competitive economy, creating opportunities for all in a way that protects and enhances our environment. Our approach to sustainable development acknowledges that the lifestyles we choose impact on others around us, both locally and in the wider world, and not always in a positive way. We need therefore to be alert to the effect that the policies and programmes of government, and the actions of society as a whole, can have on the quality of the social, economic and environmental life of our people; and what the consequences are likely to be for generations to come. It is for this reason that we have adopted "Promoting Sustainable Living" as a key cross-cutting theme in our Programme for Government, and now reflected in the title of this paper.

The debate that this document seeks to initiate is not therefore about whether we should pursue sustainable development. That has been the declared aim of the international community for at least the 10 years since the Earth Summit. The discussion we are seeking to encourage is about how best to mainstream the integrated approach to sustainable development in the way that government policies and programmes are developed and implemented; and in how, through these policies and programmes, the objectives and principles of sustainable development are encouraged and embedded in other sectors.

Fortunately, we have a solid base from which to start. As well as the commitment in the Programme for Government, the document describes a range of other Departmental strategic policies and programmes which are based on sustainable development objectives and principles. It also acknowledges that important work has been done by District Councils under the Local Agenda 21 programme established at Rio; and that the Local Strategy Partnerships being set up at District Council level to undertake integrated development planning under the EU Peace II Programme offer a potentially innovative model for local delivery of sustainable development.

It will be important to build on this foundation and, where possible, make existing structures and mechanisms part of the sustainable development framework. It will not serve Northern Ireland's interests to try to replicate what is already in place or to establish a free-standing bureaucracy for sustainable development. Such an approach could only militate against the integration we seek.

I believe that because of the building blocks we already have in place, Northern Ireland has a unique opportunity to become a model of best practice in sustainable living. However, I do not under-estimate the challenge in turning this into a reality.

In consulting on these proposals, I am seeking therefore to engage the widest possible spectrum of Northern Ireland society in dialogue on this key issue, which is of such importance to how those generations who follow us will judge the footprint we leave on our world.



DERMOT NESBITT
Minister of the Environment

May 2002

INTRODUCTION

1. The aim of this document is to seek your views on how best to achieve sustainable development in Northern Ireland.
2. In its Programme for Government: "Making a Difference" the Northern Ireland Executive has set out its vision for the future of our society. We have stated that our vision is of a peaceful, cohesive, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society, firmly founded on the "achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust and the protection and vindication of the human rights of all". Ours is a vision based on "partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South and between these islands".
3. Our wish is to develop our role as a region; and to co-operate for the benefit of all and develop a much more outward looking approach. We recognise that on many issues overall - for example, the environment, agriculture and the economy - much policy is developed at national and international levels. We accept our responsibilities to play our full part in these institutions and at the same time look after Northern Ireland's interests.
4. In implementing our vision, we seek to be a healthy society; one which encourages our children and supports our older people; a community where education is available for all; where more jobs are created in a new economy, and where the rural economy is re-invigorated and disadvantaged urban areas are renewed. Underpinning all this, we seek to improve the quality and reliability of our infrastructure and public services, while protecting our environmental assets, both natural and man-made, which define so much of people's perception of Northern Ireland.
5. This is a challenging agenda. It requires us to make progress simultaneously on a number of fronts. It also requires us to do so in such a way that progress in one sector does not undermine the prospects of achieving the objectives of another; so that, for example, increased tourism does not damage the very features which make Northern Ireland an attractive place to visit; or wealth creation does not have the effect of further marginalising already disadvantaged communities. In other words, we need to progress in a way that is sustainable - economically, socially and environmentally.
6. That is why the Programme for Government states that:

"Sustainable Development will be a key theme running through our work and priorities."

In order to ensure that we do so as effectively as possible, we need to garner the ideas of as many sectors, groups and individuals as we can. We therefore undertook to publish proposals for a Strategy for Sustainable Development.

7. This document sets out a definition of sustainable development; the main objectives and principles which, in our view, follow from that definition; and a possible framework for achieving it in Northern Ireland. Its publication is the start of a process of discussion and debate which we will seek to encourage over the coming months across all sectors and at all levels in society.
8. We aim to publish a final Strategy in 2002, after we have had the opportunity to reflect on the wide range of views we expect this process to produce. Therefore, we are seeking your comments by 30 September 2002.

WHAT IS “SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”?

9. The Brundtland Report to the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 defined it as follows:

"Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

This is now the most widely accepted definition. It is a useful definition in a number of ways. It implies that sustainability should be a feature, not just of economic or physical development, but of every way in which we develop as a society. It has a long-term perspective, indicating that we need to develop today in ways that do not deny the same opportunities to our successors. And it defines our needs broadly, moving away from the narrow notion of sustainability as a balance between economic growth and environmental protection.

10. However, it is not necessarily the only or the best definition and we would be interested in other views, not as an exercise in semantics but as a tool to help people understand the concept and so help to identify ways of delivering our vision for Northern Ireland society.
11. The Brundtland definition was adopted by the UK Sustainable Development Strategy: "A Better Quality of Life" (1999). The UK Strategy translated the definition into four main objectives that need to be pursued simultaneously, in an integrated way, if development is to be truly sustainable. These are:

- **Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone.** Everyone should share in the benefits of increased prosperity and a clean and safe environment. We have to improve access to services, tackle social exclusion, and reduce the harm to health caused by poverty, poor housing, unemployment and pollution. Our needs should not be met by treating others, including future generations and people elsewhere in the world, unfairly.
- **Effective protection of the environment.** We must act to limit global environmental threats, such as climate change; to protect human health and safety from hazards such as poor air quality, poor water quality and toxic chemicals; and to protect things which people need or value, such as wildlife, landscapes and our built heritage.
- **Prudent use of natural resources.** This does not mean denying ourselves the use of non-renewable resources like oil and gas, but we do need to make sure that we use them efficiently and that alternatives are developed to replace them in due course. Renewable resources, such as water, should be used in ways that do not endanger the resource or cause serious damage or pollution.
- **Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment,** so that everyone can share in high living standards and greater job opportunities. The UK is a trading nation in a rapidly changing world. For the country to prosper, businesses must produce the high quality goods and services that consumers throughout the world want, at prices they are prepared to pay. To achieve that, we need a workforce that is equipped with the education and skills for the 21st century. And we need businesses ready to invest, and an infrastructure to support them.

12. These objectives are underpinned in the UK Strategy by 10 guiding principles. In summary, these are:

- putting people at the centre
- taking a long-term perspective
- taking account of costs and benefits
- creating an open and supportive economic system
- combating poverty and social exclusion
- respecting environmental limits
- the precautionary principle
- using scientific knowledge
- transparency, information, participation and access to justice
- making the polluter pay

Fuller descriptions of these guiding principles are set down in Annex A.

13. We believe that these objectives and principles are wholly consistent with our vision and priorities in the Programme for Government. We have therefore endorsed them as the basis for our approach to Sustainable Development. They are reflected in our adoption of "Promoting Sustainable Living" as a key cross-cutting theme in the Programme for Government and they are being pursued in our PfG Priorities, such as "Growing as a Community", "Working for a Healthier People" and "Securing a Competitive Economy". The Executive's current Programme for Government, which was endorsed by the Assembly in December 2001, has sought further to integrate sustainable development into our overall strategic thinking across Government.

14. The emphasis is on simultaneous progress against all four objectives of sustainable development. Development will not be sustainable if progress in one area reverses, or damages the prospects of progress in another. This is consistent with the way we have framed our vision for the future of Northern Ireland. We acknowledge that economic growth and wealth creation are vital to our success. But, as the priorities and themes in the Programme for Government confirm, this cannot be economic growth at any price. As has been pointed out already, development that endangers our health, damages our valuable environmental assets, depletes finite resources, or further marginalises disadvantaged communities, will not contribute to our vision.

15. Equally we need to ensure that our approach to protecting and enhancing the environment is developed in a way that takes account of the needs of business and society; and that our social policies - in health, education, housing, welfare, transport, regeneration, community development, etc - contribute to a supportive economic climate and encourage a caring approach to our environment.

16. We recognise that this will not be easy. There will undoubtedly be tensions between the objectives. Difficult decisions will need to be made. We may need to sacrifice short-term gains for longer-term benefits. But sustainable development is not simply about making

the least harmful choice. The challenge of sustainable development is to find new approaches and new and creative ways of thinking and living, which will enable us to achieve balanced progress across all objectives.

17. This need for balance in the way we make progress will pose further challenges in the way government is administered and policies and programmes are developed. We will need to keep an eye fixed firmly on the future and to think across our respective economic, social and environmental functional compartments. Integration in policy development, delivery and review will be a key element of the new approach. We will also need to have ways of measuring progress that will reflect the objectives and principles we have adopted and allow us to secure both the progress and the balance we are seeking.

Questions:

- Do you find the Brundtland definition helpful?
- Is there another definition that you find more meaningful?
- Do you agree that the objectives from the UK Strategy are appropriate for Northern Ireland?
- Do you think our objectives could be framed in a more relevant way?
- Are these the right principles for us in Northern Ireland?
- Are there other principles which you think should be included?
- Do you think the approach to sustainable development described here is the right way to go about delivering our vision for the future?

HOW ARE WE PLANNING TO DO THIS?

18. If we are to achieve the progress, balance and integration we seek, across all sectors, then sustainable development needs to become part of the mainstream of working practice across the administration. This new way of thinking needs to be reflected in everything we do - in how we develop and review policies and programmes, in how we implement projects and address individual cases, in how we deliver government services to local communities and in how we define and measure success.
19. We believe that adoption of a framework for Sustainable Development will help to mainstream this approach across all the functions of government. We propose that the key elements of such a framework should be:

- continuing commitment by the Executive to the integrated social, economic and environmental objectives and to the principles of Sustainable Development as set out in the Programme for Government;
- decision-making at all levels that is fully aligned with these objectives and principles;
- reflecting sustainable development objectives in departmental, agency and other public sector business plans, priorities and resource allocations;
- strategic policies and programmes focused on outcomes and results which put sustainable development principles into practice;
- establishment of a range of indicators to enable the Executive to contribute to UK-level reporting of progress, to track achievement at local level and to assess the risks to future progress;
- open reporting on progress towards sustainable development;
- high-level cross-departmental co-ordinating machinery to oversee progress;
- co-ordination arrangements for integrated delivery at local and community level; and
- sharing information and best practice and learning from others.

A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Executive's Commitment

20. As already noted, Executive Ministers, collectively and individually, have endorsed the objectives and principles of Sustainable Development and have reflected them in the Programme for Government. We will ensure that the Programme for Government continues to seek the integration of social, economic and environmental objectives. Ministers individually will carry that same commitment into the work of their own Departments and the Executive Committee will continue to give priority to cross-cutting issues that straddle sectoral boundaries.

A New Way of Taking Decisions

21. We will only make the progress we desire if the way we take decisions is aligned with the objectives we are seeking to achieve. A key aspect of this is the way in which policy options are appraised in order to ensure that social and environmental, as well as economic, criteria are fully factored in. Policies and programmes are already subject to appraisal in terms of human rights, equality of opportunity and promotion of better community relations, targeting social need and regulatory impact on business. In addition to economic appraisal, environmental assessments are increasingly being used and we will be bringing on-stream rural proofing and health impact assessments. The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister have already begun work with other Departments to consider existing appraisal methods to see how far these arrangements might be integrated. This will be a complex task. The concept of sustainable development may provide a useful perspective from which to consider a more integrated approach to the assessment of the impact of policies across the social, economic and environment fronts.

Questions:

- Do you agree that policies and programmes should be subject to more integrated appraisal?
- If so, how do you think this should be done?
- Are you aware of any approaches used elsewhere that could usefully be applied?

Business and Resource Planning

22. We intend to ensure that Departments reflect the Sustainable Development guiding principles in their strategic and business plans and to require bodies sponsored or supported by them to do likewise. This would include integrating indicators (see paragraph 27 below), when agreed, into the outcome and performances measures which they use to track the impact of their plans. We will also wish to consider whether some key indicators should be integrated into Departments' Public Service Agreements.
23. It is inevitable that there will be competing demands for finite resources in implementing any Sustainable Development Strategy that emerges. Nevertheless resource planning and allocations to departmental programmes should, as far as possible, reflect the Executive's continuing commitment to these principles. This might be done by ensuring that policies which meet objectives across more than one Department or PfG Priority, in conformity with sustainable development principles, receive a commensurate degree of priority, whether in the main Budget round or in the distribution of Executive Programme Funds.

Questions:

- **Do you agree that there is scope for the business plans of Departments, agencies, etc, to reflect more fully sustainable development objectives and principles?**
- **Are you aware of any examples of business plans that do so?**
- **Do you have any suggestions for how to ensure that policies which meet objectives across more than one Department or PfG priority receive commensurate priority in resource allocation?**

Strategic Policies and Programmes

24. There already exists a substantial platform of existing and developing strategic policies which reflect Sustainable Development principles and take an integrated approach to tackling issues. These provide solid foundations on which to build, reflecting the fact that sustainable development is a core theme running through the Programme for Government, which sets the overall direction for the Executive.
25. Some specific examples include:
 - the Regional Development Strategy will influence the future distribution of activities throughout the Region. It is not limited to land use, but recognises that policies for physical development have an important bearing on other matters. The Strategy therefore addresses a range of economic, social, environmental and community issues which are relevant to delivering the objectives of achieving sustainable development and social cohesion in Northern Ireland;

- the Investing for Health initiative aims to improve the health of our people and reduce inequalities in health. It explicitly identifies the importance of environmental factors for human health. It sets out a cross-cutting agenda for change, to be directed by the Ministerial Group on Public Health, representing all Executive Departments. This agenda includes action for healthier settings, including homes, schools and colleges, workplaces, and local communities; and action for a healthier physical environment, including raising air quality standards;
- medium-term strategic priorities for the Northern Ireland economy are currently being developed for the period up to 2010 by DETI and the Economic Development Forum. These will focus on creating wealth and developing the knowledge based economy; exploiting innovation; creating a culture which supports and encourages enterprise; firmly establishing NI as a global competitor; maximising the contribution of all sectors of the community; developing an appropriate skills base and securing a competitive physical infrastructure;
- the "Growing a Green Economy" Strategy seeks to achieve sustainable economic development through more efficient business practices, minimising waste, reducing energy use and using finite resources more prudently;
- a small business strategy will be introduced to help achieve better co-ordination and effectiveness of local enterprise support, particularly within disadvantaged and rural areas;
- a Natural Resource Rural Tourism programme will seek to develop the tourism infrastructure in disadvantaged areas in a way that creates opportunities for economic activities, supports local communities and sustains environmental assets;
- policies which are being advanced on the protection of human rights, equality of opportunity, targeting social need and promoting social inclusion are all intrinsic to the achievement of sustainable development objectives;
- in education:
 - a major review of the NI Curriculum will be examining how children and young people can develop an understanding of and contribute to sustainable development;
 - a common funding formula for schools is being developed to distribute resources equitably on the basis of education and social need;
- in agriculture, the Vision Group Report has emphasised the need to promote the development of an agriculture industry that operates in a sustainable way;
- a range of local and area-based urban and rural regeneration and community development programmes which seek to integrate the delivery of economic, social and environmental objectives. In particular, a new Urban Regeneration and Neighbourhood Renewal strategy, which focuses on targeting deprivation, is currently being finalised after an extensive public consultation;

- under the EU Peace II Programme, Local Strategy Partnerships are being established at District Council level to produce Integrated Local Development Strategies;
- the Regional Transportation Strategy, currently being prepared, will seek to develop a sustainable transportation framework which will meet the transport needs of the economy and communities, as well as protecting the environment;
- cultural and linguistic diversity will be promoted and maintained as an important element in advancing the scope for cultural tourism and job creation;
- a cross-departmental strategy to deliver the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive;
- the NI Waste Management Strategy which seeks to provide environmental, social and economic benefits by minimising the amount of waste produced, significantly increasing reuse, recovery and recycling and substantially reducing the amount of waste going to landfill;
- the "Unlocking Creativity - Making It Happen" initiative which will develop capacity for creativity and innovation, thus promoting and sustaining the social, cultural and economic well-being of Northern Ireland.

26. Other examples of our plans to integrate social, environmental and economic objectives are outlined in the Programme for Government.

Questions:

- Do you think these policies are helping or will help to deliver the integrated objectives of sustainable development?
- If you do not think so, what are your reasons? Where do the weaknesses lie?
- What other policy initiatives should the Executive be taking to promote sustainable development?
- Do you have any other ideas on how strategic policies can be developed in a way that supports the achievement of sustainable development?

Indicators

27. We need to be able to measure whether or not we are achieving a more sustainable way of living, to point to areas where progress is being made and where future risks may lie. An important way of doing this is by establishing sustainable development indicators.
28. The UK Government has established a set of almost 150 indicators of sustainable development. It has selected 15 of these as "headline" indicators; these are as follows:
- Total output of the economy (GDP);
 - Investment in public, business and private assets;
 - Proportion of people of working age who are in work;
 - Poverty and social exclusion;
 - Qualifications at age 19;
 - Expected years of healthy life;
 - Homes judged unfit to live in;
 - Level of crime;
 - Emissions of greenhouse gases;
 - Days when air pollution is moderate or high;
 - Road Traffic;
 - Rivers of good or fair quality;
 - Populations of wild birds;
 - New homes built on previously developed land;
 - Waste arisings and management.
29. We will want to report on progress in Northern Ireland against the integrated social, economic and environmental objectives of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy and will use the headline indicators as a basis for doing that. However, they may not necessarily be the best or only measures of local progress. Any indicators should be readily understandable, relevant, scientifically valid, measurable and verifiable. We would like to develop our own set of priority indicators and perhaps a larger number of supporting ones. We intend to publish in due course a separate document inviting comment on a possible list of indicators. However, in the meantime we would welcome your views now on what should be covered in the indicators and on what targets might be associated with them.

Questions:

- How relevant do you think the above list of "headline" indicators is to us?
- If you think that others are needed, what subjects, in general terms, do you think they should cover?

Open Reporting on Progress

30. We think that, when this implementation framework has been established and the indicators agreed, there should be regular reports to the Executive and the Assembly on how well we are doing in trying to produce a more sustainable way of living. These reports could take into account not only the work of government departments, agencies and other non-government bodies, but also the work being done by all sectors at a local and community level. The reports, which would identify problems and suggest solutions, would be published.

High Level Co-ordination

31. We recognise the need for effective co-operation between Ministers and between their departments. One objective will be to review progress in pursuing sustainable development and deal with any problems that have arisen. It will also be important to ensure that policy-makers and administrators are given sufficient training to ensure their understanding of this new way of working. There are different options for the mechanisms to deal with this high level co-ordination. These could include the Executive Committee itself; an inter-Ministerial Group or sub-committee of the Executive; an inter-departmental group chaired by the Environment Minister or a senior DOE official. It will be important to take into account existing co-ordinating machinery to avoid duplication. It will also be important that the mechanism chosen is able to maintain a particular focus on sustainable development.

Local Co-ordination

32. It is also vital to have effective local co-ordination to ensure an integrated approach at local and community level and to provide a feedback mechanism to central government. There are already central bodies co-ordinating the delivery of government policies and programmes at a local community level. We will wish to examine whether the objectives and principles of sustainable development should be written into the terms of reference of these bodies; and whether any other bodies should be established to promote these objectives and principles at the local and community level. We will also wish to consider the role of the Local Agenda 21 initiative and the impact of the Local Strategy Partnerships under the EU Peace II Programme. A key objective of Peace II is to ensure the sustainability of an agreed, inclusive partnership approach to local planning and decision making.

Questions:

- How should we report on whether we are progressing to a more sustainable way of living?
- What should be included in any such report?
- How best might we deliver on effective high level co-ordination?
- Are Local Strategy Partnerships best placed to achieve better co-ordination of policy and programmes at local and community level or are there other options?
- What is the role for other sectors - the business and farming communities, the private and voluntary sectors - in delivering sustainable development?

Sharing Information and Best Practice

33. We think that it is important that all those involved in delivering sustainable development - central and local government, the private and voluntary sectors and the wider community - should share information about what works and what does not work, in terms of living more sustainably. We also believe it will be necessary to have a sustained effort in building up public awareness and understanding of sustainable development issues. To assist with this, we think that there could be merit in setting up a multi-sectoral forum. It could have a remit similar to that of the UK Sustainable Development Commission, which was set up in 2000, under the chairmanship of Jonathan Porritt. The UK Commission's main responsibility is to monitor progress, identify obstacles and build a consensus on action on a UK level. A Northern Ireland Forum could establish links to the UK body, as well as to relevant bodies in the other devolved administrations, in the Republic of Ireland and more widely in Europe and beyond.
34. One of the areas mandated by the North/South Ministerial Council for increased co-operation is "the identification of strategies and activities which would contribute to a coherent all-island approach to the achievement of sustainable development." A Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy will help provide the basis for developing mutually beneficial cross-border co-operation in this area.

Questions:

- Do you agree with the idea of a “Forum” for sustainable development?
- If so, what do you think its objectives should be and who do you think should be on it?
- Should it be independent of the Executive and the Assembly?
- If so, how should it relate to them and to government departments, agencies, other sectors, etc?

CONCLUSION

35. We must do everything possible to increase the quality of life and well-being of all our people and we must do this in a way which benefits future generations also. The Executive is fully committed to the fundamental principle that we should meet our needs without harming the prospects of our children and of theirs.
36. In initiating this consultation, we have set out ways in which we propose to shape the workings of government so as to achieve a more sustainable way of living. But sustainable development cannot be delivered by government, or by the wider public sector alone. We need to enlist the energies and ideas of the business, voluntary and community sectors as well; all of society has a contribution to make. Therefore we have therefore suggested ways of working together which we would like to explore over the next few months. And we have asked a series of questions, which we hope will stimulate the debate.
37. We have engaged the Sustainable Northern Ireland Programme to organise a series of sectoral and sub-regional seminars across Northern Ireland in the coming months. These are intended to provide an opportunity for a more participative approach to gathering views and comments. The outcome of these seminars will be fed into the consultation process. We would nevertheless welcome direct comments, which should be sent by 30 September 2002 to the following address:-

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River House
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BELFAST
BT1 2AW

Tel: 028 90257365

Fax: 028 90257300

Or you can email comments to alan.hamilton@doeni.gov.uk. Alternatively, if you wish to respond by text-phone, the telephone number is **028 90540855**.

38. The Department may wish to make the responses to this consultation paper available to the public and to the Northern Ireland Assembly or deposit them in its libraries. Please indicate whether your response is confidential by clearly marking this at the top of the page. Confidential responses will nevertheless be included on any statistical summary of numbers of comments received or views expressed. The Department will acknowledge all responses.
39. Further copies of this paper may be obtained from the above address. It is also available on the Environment and Heritage Service website at www.ehsni.gov.uk.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

- **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*, '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.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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