

An Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland

Responses to the 2019/20
Public Discussion Document:
Summary Report

November 2020



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1) Background

On 18 September 2019 the Department of Agriculture Environment & Rural Affairs (DAERA) launched the Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ESNI) Public Discussion Document (PDD) for an initial period of 14 weeks.

The discussion period was subsequently extended by a further 6 weeks as a result of the 2019 General Election and requests from stakeholders. The discussion period was extended to 5 February 2020.

At the end of the extended 20 week discussion period approximately 2,500 stakeholder responses had been received through a variety of channels (the NIDirect Citizen Space portal, email and hard copy).

The ESNI team in DAERA worked with NISRA statisticians to determine the appropriate approach to analysing these responses to ensure a robust and consistent methodology was applied. The findings of that analysis are outlined in this summary report which will help inform the development of ESNI.

2) Questions Posed

The PDD asked 11 questions:

- 1 Do you agree that the Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland should sit alongside existing Executive-endorsed strategies?
- 2 Do you agree that these broad environmental areas are appropriate for the Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland?
- 3 Do you agree that these are appropriate strategic themes for the Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland?
- 4 Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Engagement strategic theme?
- 5 Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Prosperity strategic theme?
- 6 Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Efficiency strategic theme?
- 7 Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Quality strategic theme?
- 8 What do you see as the main environmental governance priorities for Northern Ireland?
- 9 Do you agree that these are appropriate draft outcomes for the Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland?
- 10 What are your big ideas for the future protection and enhancement of the environment?
- 11 Do you have any other comments or contributions?

3) Responses

Responses were received from individuals, groups and organisations in the following formats:

a) Citizen Space

Responses received via the NIDirect Citizen Space portal contained responses to all 11 questions (as users were required to work their way through each question in turn on the site).

b) Emails (direct or via third party websites such as RSPB, Ulster Wildlife & MyNI)

Email responses received were a combination of structured (answering specific (all or some) questions posed) or were unstructured, i.e. not specifying which question(s) the response related to.

The majority of responses were received via email and because of the varied nature of these responses (e.g. not all responses answered the 'yes / no' questions), we are unable to publish statistics in relation to these responses. However, these responses have been included in the detailed qualitative analysis within this report.

c) Hardcopy responses

All of these responses were structured to answer the questions posed.

These responses were transcribed to enable them to be included in the analysis as part of the coding framework (see 'Methodology').

A significant number of responses were received via campaigns promoted by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, Ulster Wildlife & RSPB¹. Each campaign adopted its own standardised format to make it easy for people to respond and as a result responses received through each of these campaigns were typically identical. The Coding Framework used for the analysis included these campaign responses but by its nature does not reflect the volume of these responses. To address this the various campaign responses are reproduced at Annex A to this report.

4) Methodology

This report sets out summary findings, it does not list all comments received. The ESNI team read and considered each comment multiple times when drafting this report and will do so again when drafting the Environment Strategy.

Responses received were allocated against each of the 11 questions posed in the PDD. Where the respondent didn't specify which question(s) their response related to, the team allocated the text to the most relevant question(s).

¹ c. 50 responses from RSPB's campaign were not included in the analysis as a result of technical difficulties. DAERA has drawn this to RSPB's attention and will engage with RSPB to ensure these are considered during the Strategy drafting stage.

Once all responses were allocated to the 11 questions, analysis commenced on a question by question basis.

The ESNi team worked with NISRA statisticians to develop an appropriate approach to the qualitative analysis of the responses to the 11 questions in the PDD. A 'Coding Framework' approach was adopted which involved 'coding' each comment (identifying key word(s) or phrase(s) that summarised each comment) and then grouping these codes via a matrix to develop 'themes'. This report focuses on the key themes identified for each question.

It should be noted that the views expressed in this report are those of respondents to the PDD questions and are not necessarily shared by the Department.

5) Statistics

- *Over 91% of respondents agreed that the strategy should be Executive-endorsed.*
- *Over 83% of respondents agreed with the proposed policy areas set out in the PDD.*
- *80% of respondents agreed with the 4 proposed Strategic Environmental Themes.*
- *72% of respondents agreed with the proposed outcomes set out in the PDD.*²

Responses were received from individuals, groups and organisations. However, it was not always clear if a response was on behalf of an individual or a group/organisation. For this reason, and on NISRA's advice, statistical analysis of responses received outside of Citizen Space has not been included.

Where statistics have been included in the report (Questions 1, 2, 3 & 9), these relate to the c. 300 responses received via Citizen Space. These should provide an indication of the overall level of agreement with the PDD proposals, despite being only a subset of the total 2,500 responses received.

² These are quantitative findings from a survey via Citizen Space with a sample of 300.

6) Findings

Q1 – Do you agree that the Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland should sit alongside existing Executive-endorsd strategies?



Over 91% of respondents agreed that the strategy should be Executive-endorsd.

The vast majority of comments reflected that respondents want the Environment Strategy to be a top priority in Northern Ireland, with the overarching principles incorporated into all relevant Northern Ireland strategies and policies. Good governance in implementing the strategy and extensive collaboration when drafting were felt to be essential requirements, with key drivers being **health & well-being**, **sustainability**, **protecting the economy** and **climate change**.

Twenty six major themes were identified in the comments received and the most dominant of these themes are set out below:

Governance – comments focused on the need for the strategy to have a firm and binding legal footing to enable enforceable and strong environmental protection. It was felt that the strategy must be fully costed and financed for it to be effective, and that there must be clear lines of accountability, monitoring of outcomes and enforcement. A few comments stated the need for an independent Environment Agency, and noted that environmental and agricultural objectives can at times conflict.

Top Priority – comments reflected a fundamental desire to make the Environment Strategy a key central pillar which must sit at the forefront of all other strategies. Many respondents felt it imperative that the strategy be ambitious and that it should cover high level issues which should then be used as the bedrock of all strategies. It was also felt that the strategy must be held in a paramount position and exert significant influence to impact on other policies and strategies.

Collaboration – comments indicated a strong emphasis on collective decision making. The need for a coordinated, holistic approach was viewed as vital. The strategy should not only be cross-departmental, but needs to be considered in respect of an all-island approach and to also take international commitments into account. The strategy should be fully integrated and work in parallel with all key projects in the public & private sectors and with the general public.

Health & Wellbeing – a large number of respondents commented on how the state of the environment directly impacts on general health and well-being. This theme also links to the outdoors and public spaces theme, where having access to safe, well cared for outdoor spaces provides opportunities both for physical exercise which will improve physical health, but also the mental health benefits from time spent outdoors. Comments also reference the positive impacts that can result with an increased sense of community and the enhanced sense of wellbeing associated from volunteering opportunities.

Sustainability – many comments indicated the need to ensure that sustainability is central to the Environment Strategy to reflect that many of our resources are finite. There should be strong links with the Sustainable Development Strategy which provides a framework to support and inform the decisions and actions taken by individuals, groups and organisations in progressing the sustainability agenda.

Economy – many responses indicated that the strategy must take into account economic drivers and targets to keep business competitive, but also the need for economic and investment strategies to run in parallel and to reflect environmental concerns. The strategy should take into consideration the need to stimulate the economy and promote tourism and agriculture, with links to infrastructure and financial institutions. Comments also reflected the need to ensure the strategy is well resourced with prioritised spending ring-fenced for its effective implementation.

Central – many comments stated the strategy must be central and used to form a fundamental part of all other strategies. It should play a pivotal role and be used to reference and connect other policies and strategies. The importance of consistency & clear alignment with other schemes/plans was felt to be very important, with key environmental concerns integrated throughout.

Outcomes & Targets – comments indicated the need for outcomes and targets to be realistic, evidence based and specific, with results which are tangible, measurable & time-bound. Targets & outcomes need to be adequately monitored to ensure robust environment protection. This is seen as a key opportunity to drive forward environmental standards and improve the net environmental impact.

Nature – respondents welcomed the opportunity the strategy provides to give our natural environment positive attention, and promote & increase engagement with nature on all levels. Concerns over ecological diversity and protection of marine & wildlife were referenced, in addition to comments on ensuring animal health & welfare as well as that of plants is considered. The low level of tree cover in Northern Ireland was also raised as an actionable concern.

Outdoor Public Spaces – comments on the theme of outdoor public spaces are closely linked with the health & well-being theme. It was widely acknowledged that time spent outdoors has

a significant beneficial impact on general mental and physical health & well-being, not just for individuals but in enhancing a sense of community and civic pride. A key concern is that outdoor spaces must be easily accessible by all and well maintained.

Land Planning & Development – many respondents commented that the strategy must consider both the built and rural environment. It must impact and influence agricultural and housing development and building projects with an improvement in environmental standards needed in the construction industry, improved housing standards and infrastructure.

Biodiversity – the strategy is seen as an excellent way to protect our natural environment and promote biodiversity. Some comments referenced the current biodiversity strategy and felt that the measuring and recording of biodiversity levels should be increased and take place in a wide variety of habitats not just protected areas, to ensure a fully integrated approach.

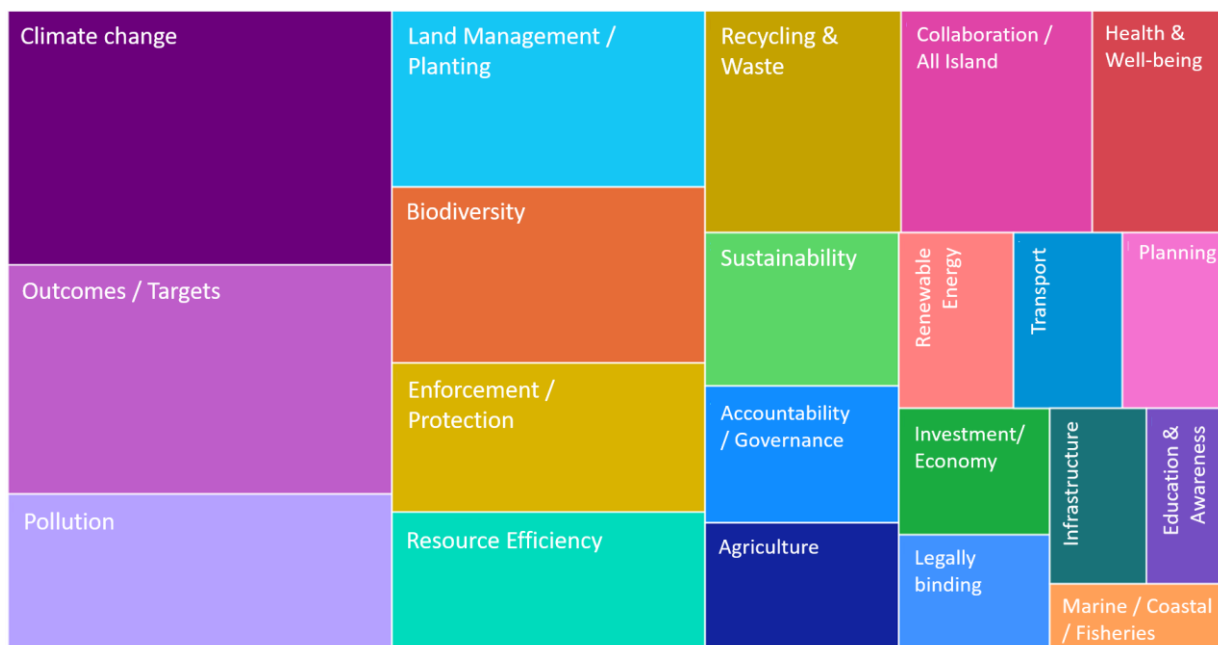
Pollution – many comments indicated concerns over pollution in our environment, with concerns over air quality, water quality and agricultural pollution featuring prominently.

Agriculture – comments reflected the need for the Environment Strategy to align with and inform agricultural policy to bring about agricultural reforms to promote more environmentally friendly and sustainable farming methods. Some agricultural practices were highlighted as a major contributor to pollution levels. Several respondents also stressed that the strategy must not hinder farming or reduce agricultural outputs.

Executive Backing – comments related to the strong need for a robust Environment Strategy in Northern Ireland which should receive full support and backing from the Executive. However, the implementation of the strategy should not be dependent on the Executive functioning, and should still proceed even if there are no Ministers in post.

Education & Awareness – the comments in this theme made reference to the need for a good communication network to disseminate environmental messages through education & increased public awareness. References were made to the need to promote positive messages & highlight good practices. Several respondents commented on the opportunity to engage schools to promote and spread key messages to bring about actual change in behaviours and attitudes.

Q2 – Do you agree that these broad environmental areas are appropriate for the Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland?



Over 83% of respondents agreed with the proposed policy areas set out in the PDD.

Over 60 unique themes were identified during the analysis of responses received to this question. Those which featured most heavily are summarised below.

Climate Change – this was the dominant theme throughout Q2. Responses stressed that we no longer have the luxury of time and a fundamental need to take major action now in order to significantly reduce our carbon emissions. Any Strategy should be reflective of the urgency with which we should be approaching such a serious subject. Many commented that this will not be possible if it simply focuses on economic needs rather than recognise the environment should come before profit. The proposed Climate Act in the New Decade, New Approach document was welcomed as it is felt that NI needs its own legally binding emissions targets.

Agriculture – the theme of agriculture/farming featured heavily throughout Q2. Many felt that farming should be more explicitly addressed within the Strategy with some remarking that a separate Farming Strategy was needed. The pollution caused by some farming practices was also a key theme with many citing damage from intensive farming practices, slurry ‘mismanagement’, pesticide use and the general ‘mismanagement’ of land as a natural resource. Some suggested that farmers should be ‘re-educated’ or subsidised to help them convert to more sustainable practices. Many respondents felt that the environment has played ‘second fiddle’ to a stronger agricultural lobby for too long.

Outcomes / Targets – whilst many thought that the document had good scope with good linkages to the UK ‘25 Year Plan’ others felt that it did not go far enough and is too broad and ambiguous. It should be ambitious, have clear policy objectives and legally binding SMART targets. It should also be a living document which is regularly monitored with a timebound action plan. Whilst everyone has a personal responsibility the Department needs to show leadership

and be accountable. A popular sentiment was that it is vital that we act now as we are running out of time.

Planting / Rewilding – there were many comments relating to afforestation/reforestation, the protection of woodlands in general and the introduction of species. It was felt that inefficient farming land should be replaced with forest bearing in mind that NI is one of the least forested parts of Europe. This approach needs to form part of a larger land use management framework to rebuild our fragmented ecosystems. We need to urgently plant trees to mitigate climatic breakdown. Rewilding and reforestation will help mitigate the effects of sudden downpours, brought on by changing weather patterns, absorbing flash floods.

Resource Efficiency/Recycling & Waste – the need to reduce waste and make more efficient use of our natural resources was a recurring theme with many commenting that there is an imbalance in the waste hierarchy and more must be done to reduce waste altogether. The existing recycling system should be optimised with additional support / facilities / encouragement needed for the reuse and recycling of materials. Energy from waste should be looked at whether that be incinerators linked to the grid or anaerobic digesters. Single Use Plastic waste featured heavily with calls for it to be banned or heavily taxed due to the damage it is causing our marine and coastal environments. Some felt that the concept of ‘resource efficiency’ would be better framed in terms of the ‘circular economy’ – to provide a more robust, holistic approach to the management of the environment.

Biodiversity – it is felt by many that biodiversity should be one of the main pillars of action in the Strategy on the basis that it underpins the health of everyone on the planet. The loss of habitats, exploitation of natural resources, invasive species and pollution are all contributing to the biodiversity crisis. The need to address the rapid loss of local biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems is highlighted. It was noted that the UK Biodiversity Action Plan is out of date as of 2016 and respondents urged that this be renewed.

Pollution – pollution was a recurring theme throughout the comments whether it related to the pollution of our waterways by toxins and plastic waste; emissions polluting the air we breathe; light and noise pollution and the ongoing blight of litter and dog fouling in our local neighbourhoods. The issue of pollution arising from farming activities also featured prominently in the comments.

Collaboration – this theme highlighted the need for collective decision making. Government departments should be working together in conjunction with local government and developing partnerships with businesses and key stakeholders as well as working with communities. A dominant sub theme was the observation that environmental issues do not respect borders. Many feel that as we share the same land, air and water, an all-island Strategy is needed which will require on-going and close cross-border co-operation at a community, local authority & departmental level. Many feel that an ‘Independent Citizens Assembly’ should be set up to give input to this and other important issues.

Sustainability – the issue of using our natural resources wisely & efficiently in a sustainable manner was raised in a number of forms: raw materials such as timber; food production; eco

building; & cutting meat consumption. Many feel that the Strategy should have mandatory linkages to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Costs – any actions need to be properly costed and significant financial investment will be required from both public & private sectors. Some feel that whilst the environment is important the least cost options should be tackled first as actions cannot be carried out in isolation from economic considerations. Grants to businesses & the farming community should be considered as a means of enhancing their environmental performance.

Energy – Renewable Energy generation needs to be brought to the fore with more emphasis on using clean renewable energy sources such as wind & solar power and not depending on short term, damaging fossil fuels. The latest large offshore wind turbines are more efficient, generate for longer periods and do not occupy land that could be used for other activities such as planting trees. A large windfarm at sea would be unseen compared to being on exposed land and could generate the same amount of electric as a small atomic power station. An incinerator should be built which is linked to the electricity grid.

Transport – sub-themes on transport include the use of electric vehicles, more vehicle charging infrastructure, an improved public transport network, more cycle routes, more pedestrian zones, reduction in car parking blight as well as the development of a Sustainable Transport Strategy.

Education & Awareness – these will be critical to delivery of the Strategy with some commenting that it should be explicit rather than embedded as part of the delivery of each of the other headings. It is recognised that very good work is being done in schools, but this needs to be broadened to all other areas of society (including the agricultural sector). There needs to be fundamental systemic change in peoples' behaviours & attitudes.

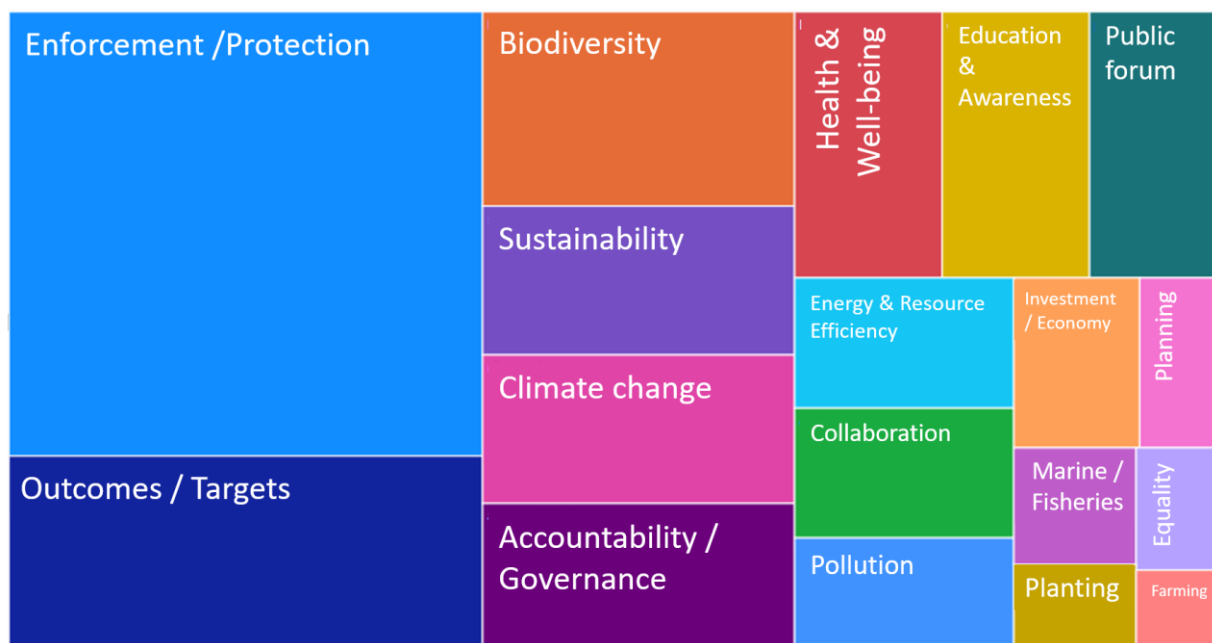
Health & Well-Being – it is recognised that having an accessible, clean & healthy environment is fundamental to the health and well-being of all citizens but some respondents feel that it is an area which is currently overlooked.

Enforcement / Penalties – many feel that there is a lack of enforcement of the current regulations whilst others feel there should be more stringent penalties for damaging the environment. The polluter pays principle should be rigorously applied especially to organisations who are repeat offenders, whether in the public or private sectors.

Planning – many felt that a review of planning legislation is needed as the issue of Permitted Development Rights (PDR) is often at odds with the protection of priority habitats & species. The issue of unintentional or deliberate misuse of PDR in the countryside needs to be addressed. The issue of development without planning permission alongside the high success rates of retrospective planning permission also needs to be reviewed.

Extraction – there were calls for the banning of extraction & mining, for example mineral mining, fracking, drilling for exploration or extraction of fossil fuels or the destruction of salt beds to produce chambers to store material such as gas.

Q3 – Do you agree that these are appropriate strategic themes for the Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland?



80% of respondents agreed with the 4 proposed Strategic Environmental Themes.

Many comments received reflected support for the 4 proposed themes as well as calls for urgent action / targets for delivery. A few comments provided opinion on which of the themes was most important. The majority of comments received related to either additional sub-themes suggested for inclusion under the 4 themes or an additional standalone theme. Regardless of whether the comment appeared to suggest a sub-theme or an additional theme, the most common theme areas have been set out below. The dominant additional theme suggestions were Environmental Protection and Education.

Environmental Protection – many comments simply stated that this should be a theme without providing further details. Tied into these comments were calls for environmental preservation & conservation.

Environmental Education – again many comments simply said that this should be a theme. Some gave examples of environmental issues that citizens should be aware of. Some comments focused on inclusion of environmental education in school curriculums whilst others related to public awareness at all ages.

Environmental Restoration / Remediation / Recovery / Resilience – these themes were mentioned by a number of respondents and have been grouped into a single theme here. Also related to these were suggestions for an Environmental Improvements theme.

Environmental Governance – this covered calls for an independent governance body, environmental legislation, accountability, enforcement and fines. Tied into Governance were responses calling for public fora or ‘Citizens Assemblies’ to allow wider participation in environmental decision making.

Environmental Prosperity – while this is already one of the proposed themes, there were a number of comments seeking Tourism, Government Funding, Environmental Economy and Circular Economy as sub-themes within this.

Climate Change and **Natural Capital** were also suggested as specific standalone themes.

Other suggested themes included: **Wellbeing, Biodiversity, Pollution** and **Energy**.

Q4 – Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Engagement strategic theme?

Many comments received supported the proposed theme.

All Citizens – comments under this theme related to the need for all citizens to be involved in environmental improvements, to instil civic pride, to motivate/encourage everyone to play their part. Some comments related to how issues such as climate change can seem overwhelming and hopeless but it's important for everyone to play their part in helping the environment. Also under this theme were comments relating to behaviour change.

Schools – many comments called for more environmental education in schools, both primary & secondary; there were also some references to tertiary education. Some comments identified specific issues that students should be educated on, such as recycling. Some comments also stated that schools could do more in terms of eco-activities/events/use of outdoor learning.

All Ages – comments received acknowledged the contribution of Eco-Schools and said that engagement / education / awareness campaigns should be directed at adults (particularly older generations).

Awareness / Education Topics – some topics were provided as suggestions for awareness / education from a large number of respondents: loss of wildlife; littering; renewable energy; sustainability; marine plastic pollution; use of plastics in business (e.g. food packaging); and climate change/crisis.

Farmers – many comments expressed a view that education in the agricultural sector could promote environmentally-friendly farming practices.

Collaboration – some comments suggested DAERA should work closely with (or in partnership with) other government departments and public bodies, businesses (Prosperity Agreements were specifically mentioned by some), eNGOs, environmental justice groups and individuals. North-South co-operation was also referenced.

Events – comments focused on the use of various events from large government / business / eNGO events, through to Council and local community events, all with the aim of benefiting the environment.

Engagement – some comments listed areas where there should be enhanced engagement e.g. interaction with natural heritage.

Campaigns – some comments focused on campaigns aimed at both individuals and organisations, to raise awareness/educate/motivate (re: environmental issues & the importance of environment / nature). Social media (for two-way communication) and paid advertising campaigns were highlighted. Also under this theme were some comments asking for messages to be easy to understand, with less use of technical language.

Access – some comments focused on the need for improved access to the environment, for example, for those living on housing estates with no green spaces nearby. Under this theme there were also comments calling for better access to online information through the use of technology. A few used this question to call for: an environmental court; independent governance body; and access to robust enforcement.

Wellbeing – the benefits derived from engaging with the environment were raised as something that people should be more aware of.

Public Forum – a public forum / Citizens' Assembly was suggested as a means to engage the public in environmental issues and provide two-way communication.

Incentives – some comments suggested the use of incentives to increase engagement, such as awards (e.g. flags) or financial subsidies/grants.

Transport – public awareness of the benefits of using public transport / car shares was raised along with more cycle journeys.

Aarhus Convention – a few responses stated that DAERA's environmental engagement should be compliant with the Article 1 Objective: "In order to contribute to the protection of the right of every person of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being, each Party shall guarantee the rights of access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters in accordance with the provisions of this Convention."

Q5 – Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Prosperity strategic theme?

Protection – many respondents felt that prosperity could not be measured in monetary terms but that the protection of the natural environment would increase the wellbeing of all life and natural resources, and result in increased prosperity. Protection of the natural environment should not have to have a monetary value attached to make it valid; the natural environment is valuable to the local economy. Respondents felt that protection was needed for our hedgerows, trees, natural habitats (bogs, heath, etc.), bees, water systems, rewilding with mining/fracking for minerals being banned. The United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals were suggested as a means of determining and evaluating environmental prosperity.

Farming – the themes of farming and agriculture featured throughout the comments in this section. Many comments raised our reliance on the agri-food sector but that improvements had to be made with a switch to sustainable environmentally-friendly farming methods to negate the negative impacts of farming. Many respondents said that we should move away from intensive

farming for animal products towards more plant based options. More should be done to tackle agri-waste e.g. carbon sequestration & capture, slurry run off, single use plastic packaging from hay bales. Many suggested the development of a Land Use Strategy for Northern Ireland to enable the best use of our land and to ensure that the land continues to provide goods and services to society while minimising adverse impacts on this natural resource.

Targets – many respondents felt that urgent action was needed to prevent climate breakdown, to reduce our carbon emissions and move to a low-carbon economy with the sectors negatively affected given appropriate support through the transition. A large number of responses called for a ban on fracking/mining however others commented on the 'green economy' concept and observed that mining for raw materials required for a sustainable future can often carry negative *perceptions* and suggested using best practice measures to minimise risk of pollution and adding back 'natural capital' to sites. Many suggested that we need to legislate for a 'Green Economy' with incentives given to businesses to put measures in place with the potential creation of new employment opportunities. Many respondents endorsed the recommendations of the 'Lay of the Land – RSA Food, Farming & Countryside Northern Ireland Report'. Many cautioned on the failure to integrate policies such as those resulting from implementation of the 'Going for Growth Strategy' which saw a drive to expand the agri-sector in order to grow sales without due regard to the environmental implications.

Tourism – many respondents felt there was huge potential for improving our Eco Tourism, Historic Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Open Farms, Wellness Tourism, Activity Tourism and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It was felt that the negative impacts of tourism needed to be better managed and protections for the natural environment put in place. The development of tourism and leisure activities should be accompanied by an environmental benefit/uplift or mitigation rather than simply exploitation of the environment. Many respondents called for the development of an overarching Sustainable Tourism Strategy which respects and protects our valuable natural heritage and is based on a 'high value' tourism model rather than 'high volume'. A number of respondents felt that the introduction of National Parks within Northern Ireland should be considered which would preserve and protect our unique landscapes and biodiversity. Tourism could be boosted by a right to roam law connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing, with a focus on rural access.

Wellbeing – it was widely accepted that a clean and healthy environment contributes to the physical and mental wellbeing of society. Many respondents felt that environmental prosperity was about citizens' wellbeing (not just economic performance) and that the two were interconnected – the degradation of one affects the other. 'Green Prescriptions' should be more widely recognised by GPs who should be encouraging patients to get out doors, walk to work etc. to improve their mental and physical health.

Government Funding – many respondents felt that government funding should be made available to: farmers; ecosystem services; tourism; the development of a 'Green Economy'; increase biodiversity; boost recycling; citizens to play their part; and sustainable forestry. However adequate funding was likely to be the biggest challenge. A successful transition to a green economy will need innovative approaches to enable more small businesses to access

finance. 'Green finance' will be central to providing the flows of capital needed with subsidies linked to environmental outcomes. Policy creation, regulation and incentives that encourage green finance are going to be essential to ensure sufficient funds to permit the capital investment small businesses will need to make if they are to play their part. Improved links to other government departments (e.g. health and education), including shared funding of projects, were recommended.

Transport – many respondents said that we should invest more in public transport links and improve services in rural areas. We should be striving to make all public transport environmentally friendly and provide more park & ride facilities. It was felt that the use of alternative energy source vehicles should be encouraged and that Northern Ireland needs a better network of charging points. There needs to be more promotion and encouragement of digital alternatives for business meetings etc. to reduce the use of air travel. The introduction of a congestion charge for Belfast was suggested.

Energy – there needs to be investment in local renewable energy such as wind, solar, tidal, etc. as an alternative to fossil fuels which are damaging to the environment. Whilst many respondents were in favour of wind turbines others felt that they were unsustainable and should not be expanded. Renewable energy should be affordable. Government needs to allow and support as much green electricity production as possible. There were concerns around the length of time it can take to get new renewable energy projects off the ground in Northern Ireland.

Natural Capital – there should be greater recognition of natural capital and the true value of the landscape as a whole. Respondents said they wanted to engage with nature more than ever and spend their time and money in new creative ways. Many respondents called for the introduction of National Parks within Northern Ireland.

Education – many felt that environmental education needs to be high on the agenda with the subject taught in schools and the development of more educational qualifications for secondary/tertiary level based on the green economy. Tailored training & support programmes for farmers and for small & medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) on climate change were suggested.

Planning – many respondents felt there needed to be much stricter planning controls in place for all developments with a better understanding of the detrimental environmental impacts developments can have. It was felt that the potential financial gain from developing a site is seen to outweigh its value as a park, woodland, etc. and that a better balance needed to be found. Sites that support wildlife, plants & trees need to be protected from destructive development.

Activities – there is a need for safer cycle paths (greenways) to protect cyclists from traffic and fumes and a call for more public footpaths and coastal walking routes which would greatly improve environmental prosperity. It was highlighted that responsible recreation is an essential component of our environment not just for the revenue it generates but, more importantly, the health and environmental awareness benefits it offers.

Waste – many respondents called for improved and increased recycling facilities to reduce waste with everything we use being part of a circular economy.

Litter – Respondents felt that there was too much litter and specifically roadside litter. A suggestion to help tackle litter was the introduction of a "see it, lift it, bin it" scheme at pay-in environmental spaces where visitors who pick up litter left by others could be eligible for a small refund, or some other appropriate incentive.

Prosperity Agreements – A number of respondents felt that the DAERA NIEA Prosperity Agreements fail to address the *global* impact (e.g. ecological degradation, climate change) of those organisations who have signed up to the scheme. One commented that the use of Prosperity Agreements should be extended.

Q6 – Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Efficiency strategic theme?

Outcomes / Targets – the dominant theme with this question was around climate change and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as many respondents believed the world is facing a climate emergency and significant action needs to be taken as a matter of urgency.

Respondents felt that Northern Ireland is currently lagging behind the rest of the UK and Ireland in relation to action on climate change & biodiversity and that DAERA should identify the climate crisis as the primary driver from which improvements in environmental efficiency could be made with new Northern Ireland legislation for a Climate Act to include binding objectives and more stringent protocols around how we measure progress. GHG reduction targets should not compromise other aspects of the environment and there is a need for a stronger focus on the relationship between climate change and health.

Responses indicated that cutting the UK's (including Northern Ireland) net GHG emissions to zero by 2030 is a necessary action with many respondents saying that Northern Ireland should go further than the UK targets. It was felt the Environment Strategy should work in tandem with the new Energy Strategy.

Whilst it is felt that Councils will play a key role in helping to increase resource efficiency, there are concerns that targets around landfilling and recycling of waste as presently set may conflict with circular economy aspirations and objectives.

A number of comments focused on damaging agricultural emissions and the need to take corrective action to reduce them. Suggestions on how to achieve this included: giving farmers direct help & advice suited to their particular needs; the creation of a Biodiversity Index which could be assessed on a regular basis along with incentivising, discouraging and eliminating various land management practices; and a move away from cattle farming which causes excessive methane production to growing cereal and other crops as well as fruit and vegetables.

The development and delivery of a suite of 'nature based solutions' that deliver benefits in relation to climate, biodiversity & pollution was supported. The serious decline in biodiversity

within Northern Ireland needs urgent attention with assessment needed of diversity, resilience, plant & soil health status and susceptibility to pests and diseases.

Government Departments/Public Bodies should be encouraged to embrace 'Climate Transformation' with NICS leading the way on environmental efficiency. Many respondents felt that we should be trying to be more imaginative/creative and to embrace innovation to find solutions.

Energy Sources – many respondents said that renewable energy sources should be easier to construct e.g. windfarms, solar farms and tidal energy. The goal should be to generate Northern Ireland's electricity entirely from renewable energy sources, supplemented by world class state-of-the-art energy storage systems.

Reintroducing subsidies to encourage take up of renewable energies by domestic and business users would help steer people towards the types of behaviour change that can have a lasting impact with schemes properly implemented and scrutinised.

Public buildings should be fitted with solar panels. Some respondents felt that there should be a proven net gain to biodiversity and the natural environment before approval was given for hydro energy. Some respondents highlighted the size of turbines being installed and the negative impacts on the landscape, its flora and fauna.

There were conflicting views on anaerobic digestion/co-digestion. Some believe that food waste should be used to generate 'green gas' whilst others were concerned that converting waste to energy produces large amounts of CO₂.

Many respondents want to eliminate the use of fossil fuels but needed government help to find affordable alternatives, one of which could be 'contemporary fuel' i.e. fuel that is grown, prepared and then (within months) consumed e.g. coppiced timber, tree pruning's, etc. Fossil fuels need to be priced out of the market to cease our dependence on them.

Enforcement, Protection & Planning – many respondents feel that Northern Ireland needs a "fit-for-purpose" Planning Service with amended building regulations / planning policies to allow Councils to set much higher local energy efficiency standards for permitted developments. A large number of respondents also opposed all mining and fracking.

Respondents strongly felt that an independent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should be established to provide ambitious targets, transparent reporting and improved enforcement and accountability. The EPA would need to collaborate closely with departments and Councils in a review of planning regulations.

There was a strong feeling that current regulations lack enforcement and that there should be strict penalties for damaging the environment. Enforcement regulations make it easier for citizens to change behaviours as opposed to relying on voluntary actions/behaviour change.

Recycling & Waste – respondents felt that there were a number of areas where a difference could be made to environmental efficiency e.g. reducing plastic waste and other litter, reducing and reusing all other potential waste items, adjusting consumption in favour of environmentally sustainable food. There should be incentives for reducing waste and penalties for businesses

for waste inefficiency. There should be a focus on increased recycling and re-use of materials to drive a strong circular economy with a target of zero waste. Many felt that further education on what can / cannot be recycled in different geographical areas was needed while others said that all households should have the same recycling scheme. There was a suggestion that there should be recycling & general waste facilities on the streets. Clear goals should be set to meet the challenges of plastic waste management which could provide an opportunity for economic growth, job creation and prosperity.

Transport – many comments received focused on the improvements needed to the electric car infrastructure – in particular providing additional charging points. Sustainable transport, including hybrid buses, should be encouraged with thought given to electric car purchase schemes. Collaboration with other government departments is needed to develop sustainable road and rail networks and improved cycling infrastructure. Respondents felt that current public transport connections were poor and the current rural network was virtually non-existent with a need for lower prices and faster, more frequent services. The ‘People Strategy’ and ‘Road to Zero Strategy’ should be referenced in the Environment Strategy.

Collaboration – comments received highlighted the need for all government departments to work together alongside local government, communities and business. A holistic approach should be adopted regarding issues over the whole of the island of Ireland. At a policy level there is a need to bridge the gap between the varying remits of different bodies to benefit from an overarching ‘bigger picture’ perspective.

Subsidise / Incentivise – many respondents highlighted the need for subsidies for householders to install renewable energy sources, insulation, electric cars and appliances to help achieve carbon neutrality. Many respondents said that deposit return schemes and extended producer responsibility agreements should be incentivised. Incentives for agriculture and land managers to increase biodiversity and to support environmentally responsible/friendly farming could be introduced to replace CAP after EU exit. Many felt that voluntary action to improve environmental efficiency was not enough and behavioural change requires more regulatory imperatives. Future policy should shift away from seeking to subsidise technologies that continue to encourage the production of heat, methane and other greenhouse gases.

Education – A number of responses said that encouragement is needed for householders to compost their food waste. The value of heritage (cultural, built, archaeological, etc.) should be recognised in the Strategy. There were suggestions that education could take place in schools, workplaces, communities and places of worship with eNGOs leading the way in providing best practice examples and education.

Production & Food – many respondents called for a local food strategy, encouraging sustainable food and consumption policies. Sustainable consumption will require education highlighting the benefits of locally sourced food and reducing food miles. Local producers should be guaranteed a fair price for their goods with food sourced sustainably and ethically. It was stated that this will require a reduction in the production and consumption of meat and dairy due to GHG emissions from agriculture and cattle farming, however others stated that agriculture supplies food, stores carbon and generates renewable energy and that research should look to

new and emerging science such as accounting for short lived GHGs. It was felt that reducing food waste at all stages from production through to consumption & disposal should be a priority.

Agriculture – many respondents felt that agriculture has the single largest detrimental impact on the Northern Ireland environment and required immediate attention with farmers receiving direct help & advice and support through environmentally responsible farming policies that were flexible to meet the individual needs of each farm and farmer's circumstances. Low-carbon farming practices, afforestation and agroforestry all have a crucial role to play in reducing emissions. The Northern Ireland Sustainable Agricultural Land Management Strategy should not be solely focused on agriculture but should integrate with biodiversity, spatial planning, and climate change and health & wellbeing policies. There was a view that agriculture plays a role in protecting biodiversity as our farms have a large number of hedgerows while others felt that agri-environment schemes should be about more than “free fences” and that real habitat gains are required. There should be no allowance for harmful and contradictory practices such as surface slurry spreading, round-bale plastic burning, habitat removal, land drainage and waste dumping.

Planting – many respondents felt that more indigenous trees and bee friendly plants should be planted including in urban areas and planting targets set. Trees and plants increase biodiversity, capture carbon, produce oxygen, mitigate against floods and ammonia deposition. Road verges, railway cuttings and gardens are important refuges for wildlife and improve connectivity between habitats. There are now definite medical links between quiet open green spaces, water spaces, etc. and better mental and physical health. These green solutions can be successfully ‘planned in’ and transfer grey to green in urban areas. Northern Ireland should ensure that effective policy is in place to support afforestation/agroforestry/reforestation on both private and public land to transform the bio economy, and the wider sustainability benefits of creating and better managing more woodland.

Sustainability – many respondents comment on how we need to make our water supply more efficient and protect our waterways with emphasis on sustainable water use and sustainable water management. The strategy should tie in with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. More education is needed and resources should be used more efficiently towards the goal of sustainability within our planetary boundaries and our remaining carbon emissions budget. Northern Ireland should develop and protect a sustainable green infrastructure to provide a broad range of environmental benefits for society.

Nature – many respondents felt that the natural environment was under-valued. Respondents felt ‘Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems’ (SUDS) could be used in all types of development to provide a natural approach to managing drainage. It was believed that ‘green energy’ was always seen as positive but can have a damaging effect on the natural environment and there should be a proven net gain to biodiversity and the natural environment before approval. There was support for the development and delivery of a suite of ‘nature based solutions’.

Litter – many respondents commented on the need for a reduction in marine litter from the shipping and fishing industries. Additional enforcement powers were required to deal with litter, fly-tipping etc. A comprehensive Northern Ireland Litter Strategy needs to be developed.

Q7 – Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Quality strategic theme?

Governance – this was the dominant theme and extends to: an independent body; legislation; enforcement; protection; and monitoring.

Planting – mainly trees but also plants & hedges. Related to this were comments calling for protection and/or extension of existing green space.

Recycling / Waste / Litter – many responses focused on one or more of these 3 areas. Increased/improved recycling. Better, more efficient waste management. Litter comments also covered dog fouling, fly tipping and calls for more clean-ups/litter picks.

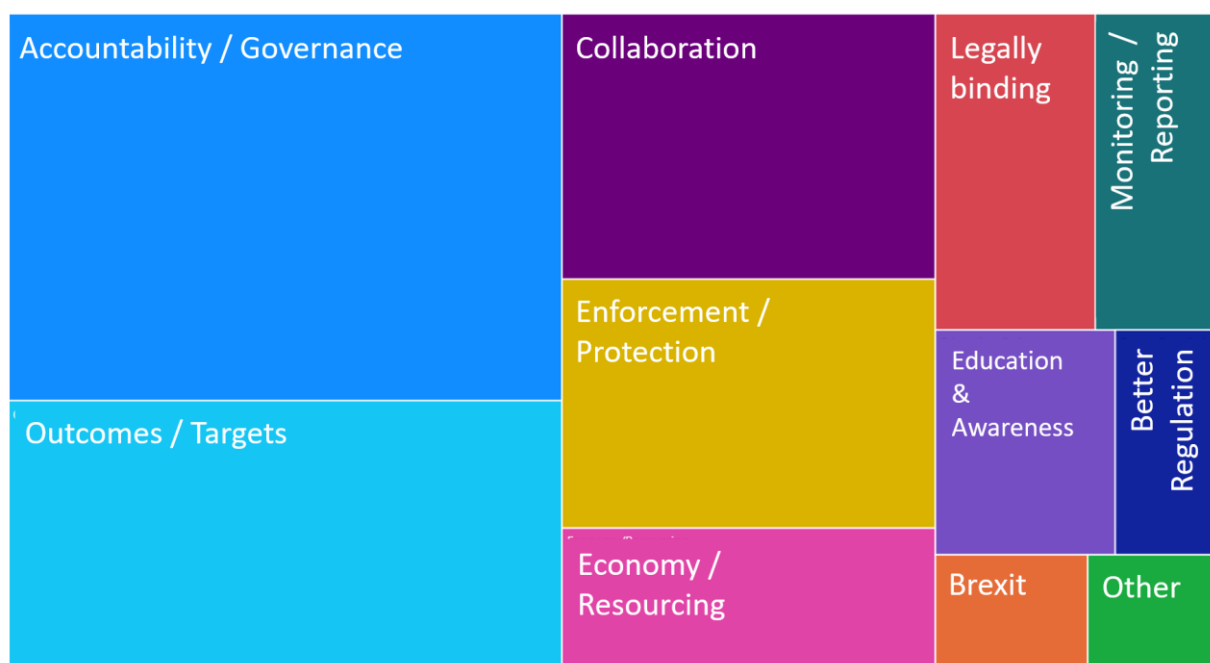
Transport – many comments referred to the need to reduce fossil fuel for transport. Comments suggested flexible working practices to reduce commutes as well as calls for more cycle lanes to offer more transport alternatives.

Pollution – a number of different sub themes emerged from this: plastics, noise, air, marine, and neighbourhood. Farming-related pollution was also referenced.

Funding – comments referred to the need for government funding to assist with problems such as pollution, changing public transport to more environmentally friendly/renewable energy sources and funding for farmers to help them farm in a more environmentally friendly manner.

Education / Awareness – there were a number of comments relating to increased environmental education and public awareness to improve environmental quality and increase awareness of the benefits to our wellbeing derived from a healthy environment.

Q8 – What do you see as the main environmental governance priorities for Northern Ireland?



Independent Body – a large volume of responses stated that an independent body was required for good environmental governance. Many stated that the body's powers should be set in legislation. This body could provide advice to all departments when developing strategies.

Should not be any real or perceived conflict of interest e.g. the body should not be associated with a government department. Need for transparency in its processes, operations and reporting.

Collaboration – respondents stated that there should be collaboration with the rest of the UK and Ireland. The strategy itself should also be cross-departmental to reflect that there are important considerations across health, economy, etc. There should be knowledge sharing across bodies and governments, public and private sectors and individuals.

Resources – the governance body should be efficient, it should have adequate but not excessive resources. The body should be adequately staffed or have access to relevant expertise. Funding should be independent i.e. not via a government department.

Accountability – both in terms of an independent body ensuring individuals/organisations are accountable for their actions and the independent body itself is accountable in terms of discharging its duties.

Enforcement – the independent body should have powers of enforcement and there was a suggestion for an environmental police force.

Penalties – there were suggestions for stricter and larger fines for breaches of regulations as well as increased powers such as the ability to close a business that is in continued breach of regulations. A few responses raised the 'polluter pays' principle.

Monitoring & Reporting – the independent body should be responsible for monitoring and reporting against environmental targets. The segregation of duties was mentioned by some respondents.

Public Awareness & Education – some respondents felt that it was important that the public (including those with disabilities or learning difficulties) were aware of environmental laws, environmental issues and problems in terms of the negative consequences of particular actions.

Regulation & Accountability – respondents commented that limits (building, mining, fishing, use of fossil fuels) should be set and there should be accountability for any breach of these limits. Some stated that these limits should be set in legislation.

Executive Backing – comments stated that the strategy and/or governance body should have NI Executive backing. Some responses stated that a new government department should be established solely for the environment.

Economic Pressure – many responses were in relation to a concern that economic pressure may take precedence over the environment. Tied into this theme were comments relating to better regulation. All strategies and decisions should consider environmental impacts, not just financial.

Clear Process & Structures – the governance structures and roles should be clear. There should be clear processes and these should include the right of appeal, judicial review, etc. Some suggested the establishment of an Environmental Court or Environmental Commissioner. Transparency is key.

Outcomes/Targets – environmental outcomes and targets should be agreed. These targets should have the facility to be fluid to react to changing developments. Many felt that these targets should be set in legislation. A series of outcomes and targets were suggested under this question. Some current environmental issues (mainly local) were cited as reasons for needing an independent body and tougher legislation. Some comments stated that targets should be ambitious and that Northern Ireland should aim to become a global leader.

Timescales – many comments focused on the need for realistic timescales in terms of establishing a new governance body, new processes and in terms of achieving outcomes / targets.

Brexit – leaving the EU was cited by some respondents as a key reason a new independent body is required as well as new environmental legislation.

Crucial – many responses simply stated that environmental governance as a whole should be seen as high priority.

New Indicators – some respondents commented that there is a need for new indicators to replace / complement existing ones.

Some responses arguing against a new body suggested a reform to existing governance &/or the NI Environment Agency.

Non-compulsory Governance – a few respondents felt that governance should not be imposed and should be left as a voluntary option.

Q9 – Do you agree that these are appropriate draft outcomes for the Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland?

72% of respondents agreed with the proposed outcomes set out in the PDD. The majority of those disagreeing suggested one or more *additional* outcomes or *amendments* to the proposed outcomes.

Support – a large number of responses reflected agreement with the proposed outcomes.

Additional Outcomes – some suggested additional outcomes such as: move to low carbon economy; ‘green economy’ (growing the economy in an environmentally friendly manner); tree cover; outdoor education time for children; collaboration; and environmental governance (including prosecutions & fines).

Amendment to Outcomes – some responses suggested changes to the proposed outcomes to make them more ambitious e.g. instead of ‘biodiversity loss halted’ the outcome should be ‘biodiversity loss reversed’. Many comments focused on the ‘reduced greenhouse gases’ outcome and suggested it should be changed to (or have a separate outcome for) ‘carbon

neutral' with a range of dates proposed. Some stated that the outcomes, as drafted, don't provide detail.

Targets – in terms of time and specific targets e.g. a % reduction in X by a specific date. Tied to this were comments suggesting the need for measurement of progress towards these targets. Some commented that the outcomes should be SMART and that adding timescales would help provide a sense of urgency. Some responses focused on the need for targets to be legally binding.

How – many of the respondents agreed with the draft outcomes but wanted to see details on how they would be achieved, by which mechanisms, and by whom. Some comments reflected the challenge in achieving these outcomes.

Unrealistic – some comments support the draft outcomes but feel they are unachievable e.g. suggestions that zero waste is unrealistic and that more efficient waste disposal/recycling is a more appropriate outcome.

Prioritisation – many of the respondents agreeing with draft outcomes suggested prioritising the outcomes to show their importance and urgency.

Q10 – What are your big ideas for the future protection and enhancement of the environment?



Comments focused more on nature rather than the environment more generally. 40 major themes were identified in the comments received. The most dominant of these themes have been set out below.

Crucial – many comments shared individual views as to why nature/environment is so important (such as the connection between nature and our existence) and why action must be taken now

for the sake of future generations (such as preventing further irreversible losses). Many comments stated that nature/environment should be given priority above all else.

Protection – many comments stated that nature/environment should be protected or mentioned specific elements within these that should be particularly protected.

Planting / Reforestation – planting of various types of trees, plants and hedges were a common theme.

Education / Public Awareness – many comments referenced the need for more environmental education (at all ages) and information on how to live a more environmentally friendly life. There were also calls for increased public awareness of environmental issues including increased dissemination of environmental reporting.

Transport – subsidised public transport; carbon neutral vehicles; more pedestrianised areas; more footpaths and cycle ways; flexible working practices to reduce commuting.

Collaboration – between individuals, individuals and government, North-South co-operation. Linked to this theme were calls for all citizens to have an opportunity to be involved in helping the environment, with individual commitment needed.

Energy – energy was frequently mentioned in various guises. There were calls for less consumption of fossil fuels (or complete bans) and alternative transport energies such as electric or hydrogen. Suggestions for increased use of renewable/green energies such as solar panels and wind farms.

Nature Networks & Recovery Networks – including ‘wildlife corridors’. A spatial plan that identifies and creates corridors and areas of habitat enabling wildlife to move in response to climate change. This could connect wild places and bring wildlife into peoples’ lives. A legally-binding network would mean that wildlife is prioritised when managing land and planning development.

Natural Assets & Green Spaces – comments often referred to various natural assets and green spaces within Northern Ireland that should be protected and appreciated.

Carbon – concern over carbon emissions (as well as other GHGs) and suggestions for improved carbon sequestration were a common theme.

Wildlife – many comments referred to wildlife generally and also to specific elements; bees were mentioned by a number of people. Comments referred to the importance of the ecosystem, the role played by wildlife and concerns of extinction of species for future generations.

Preservation / Conservation – leading on from wildlife were comments focused on preservation/conservation/restoration of wildlife and habitats, concerns over erosion of green spaces & natural habitats, and the effects of pollutants.

Rewilding – specifically in terms of restoration there were various comments related to rewilding, either rewilding generally or specific species mentioned.

Wellbeing – wellbeing and/or wellbeing index. Physical and mental health benefits of nature/environment highlighted. Tied to this theme were comments regarding investment in and the protection of outdoor activities in nature.

Planning / Building – there were calls for less building on green spaces, tighter planning controls and for existing/new buildings to be more environmentally friendly in terms of emissions and use of renewable energies.

Outcomes / Targets – many comments provided suggested outcomes/targets, such as a date for Northern Ireland becoming carbon neutral. Some comments also mentioned the desire to see measurable benefits as a result of the Environment Strategy.

Expertise – this included following and learning from examples from other countries. Technology was also suggested by many as a means to provide better / innovative environmental solutions.

Farming – many comments sought tighter farming regulations in terms of land use and emissions / pollution. Others commented on the need for more environmentally friendly / sustainable farming, which could be subsidised or other forms of government assistance to farmers. Other comments focused on the importance of local farming, growing our own produce and requiring less imports.

Lead By Example – many comments centred on the desire for Northern Ireland to lead by example in environmental practices. Along with this were comments regarding Northern Ireland's natural beauty / assets / landscape. Others said that NICS / government should lead by example in areas such as flexible working practices (reducing unnecessary journeys) and use of fossil fuels.

Public Forum / Citizens' Assembly – there were calls for ways in which there could be more engagement on the environment with the public and potentially the use of a Citizens' Assembly (for all ages) with powers over environmental decisions, legislation, etc.

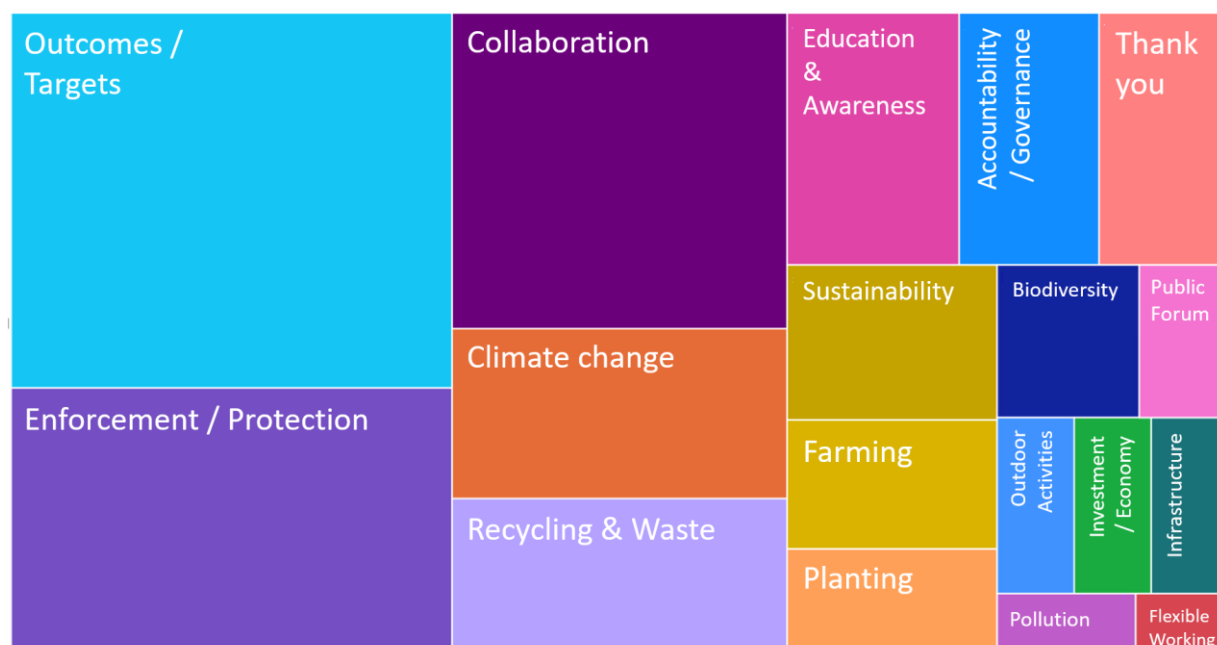
Plastics – calls for bans on single use plastics, less use of plastics in general (particularly less plastic food packaging) and use of refillable water bottles.

Investment – some comments related to increased government investment generally or for specific areas. Tied into this were suggestions for provision of adequate resources to be provided to public bodies for environmental improvements.

Legislation / Brexit / Fines – many comments related to a need for legislation for various reasons, mostly governance and enforcement measures, especially in terms of leaving the EU. A specific legislative request was a Northern Ireland Climate Act. Other comments related to punitive measures – fines, taxes on businesses causing pollution, etc.

Litter – concerns over litter were a common theme as well as suggestions for more clean-ups of beaches, rivers and coastal areas.

Q11 - Do you have any other comments or contributions?



Over 100 themes were identified during the analysis of comments received to question 11.

The dominant themes identified were: need for commitment to outcomes/targets; suggestions for collaboration from individuals to governments; and calls for better regulation.

Outcomes / Targets – many comments related to the need for plans, outcomes and targets to be transparent, achievable and ambitious. The strategy should include both short and longer term targets to make and see improvements immediately whilst also reporting progress against longer term targets such as achieving carbon neutral status. Comments also referenced the need to keep targets under review and revise as required. The strategy was seen by many as a great opportunity to make environmental improvements.

New Targets / Indicators – many comments centred on the use of new indicators to determine progress in terms of physical and mental health. Many responses referred to the use of a Wellbeing Index to link health and environment. Some responses quoted health issues and their links to environmental concerns.

Commitment – many responses centred on the need to commit to develop and adhere to the Environment Strategy, existing strategies &/or legislation. Many stated that there is a need to commit to change to tackle issues such as climate change immediately, from individual commitment to organisations and government.

Collaboration – between individuals, individuals and public bodies, North-South co-operation, and international collaboration will enable more efficient working and sharing of resources as well as recognising that the environment doesn't recognise borders.

Expertise – there were offers of help from individuals with their own areas of expertise as well as advice to consult various publications and individuals/organisations with specific areas of

expertise. Many organisations also offered their support to help develop the Environment Strategy.

Individual Contributions – under this theme were a few sub-themes: comments asking for a public forum/citizens assembly; more volunteering; more participation from both younger & older generations; and individuals with particular expertise / interests. Aligned to this were education / awareness comments that individuals should be more aware of the part they can play to help improve our environment.

Farming – various comments were received in relation to farming/agriculture, mostly relating to delivering more environmentally friendly practices and government subsidies to help farmers farm in a more environmentally friendly manner. A number of responses felt that public perception of farming was not a fair reflection in terms of environmental impact.

Carbon Sequestration – a large number of respondents called for protection of existing woodlands, more trees to be planted, restoration of peatlands & planting of appropriate species.

Government Support – some comments focused on a need for non-financial support from government, for example, to assist small businesses convert to more environmentally friendly practices and to assist farmers.

Public Awareness & Education – a recurring theme across the responses to the various PDD questions. Comments received under this question focused mainly on ensuring the public was aware both of current environmental problems and how they can contribute to helping improve the environment. In terms of education, some comments were tied into public awareness while others focused on environmental qualifications and the environment featuring more explicitly in school curriculums. Some schools provided comments setting out what environmental activities they're undertaking as well as environmental education.

Funding – finance was raised by a number of respondents in terms of government backing for environmental improvements, subsidies (e.g. farming, free public transport) and infrastructure (e.g. cycle paths, foot paths, electric vehicle charge points, public water fountains)

Clean-Ups – to tackle contaminated land, beaches and coastline.

Climate Change / Crisis – there were a number of comments asking for immediate action to tackle the “crisis” and many called for Northern Ireland legislation.

Thank You – a large number of participants commented that they were grateful for the opportunity to comment on the PDD and contribute to the development of the Environment Strategy.

Flexible Working – many comments centred on reducing worker commutes through flexible working / working from home. Many felt NICS should lead by example on this.

New Builds – a number of comments called for tighter building regulations, whether it be to protect green spaces or to ensure that new buildings are more environmentally friendly in terms of emissions and energy sources.

Transport – there were suggestions for: a reduction in use of fossil fuel vehicles; use of electric vehicles; more foot paths and cycle routes; car shares; and free / subsidised public transport.

Natural Reserves – there were a number of comments calling for bans or tougher regulation in respect of: fracking; gas exploration; and mining of precious metals.

Good News – some comments recommended highlighting what Northern Ireland is doing well and improvements that have already been made.

7) Next Steps

DAERA intends to commence drafting work on the Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ESNI) working with stakeholders and other departments through a process of co-design. The analysis of responses to the PDD as summarised in this report will help to inform that co-design process.

The Department intends to publish a draft version of ESNI as part of an 8 week public consultation by March 2021, providing citizens and organisations across Northern Ireland with a further opportunity to engage in the development of the Strategy.

Campaign Responses

Q1 Executive-endorsed Environment Strategy

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (KNIB) campaign: the need to create healthier communities by providing opportunities to get together more outdoors in accessible public spaces 'to do good and feel good' through practical environmental action – linking in with other strategies around sustainable development, mental health and well-being. Research has shown the benefits that volunteering has for an individual's general health.

Q5 Strategic Theme: Environmental Prosperity

KNIB campaign: Invest more in public transport, making our dependence on cars less necessary and improving air quality.

Q7 Strategic Theme: Environmental Quality

KNIB campaign: Plant more native trees. We have the lowest level of tree cover anywhere in Europe and want to see 20% of our land planted with trees; important for nature to thrive. Create a waste free society where we use less, waste less and stop polluting our seas. And anything we use, including single use plastics, needs to be part of a truly circular economy. Help everyone learn how to grow more tasty local food and provide plants for our pollinating bees.

Q9 Proposed Outcomes

Wildlife Trusts campaign: Overall, the six proposed outcomes are a step in the right direction - but these must be underpinned by measurable, binding time-bound targets for safeguarding our natural life-support systems: a plan that reflects the true value of nature to our well-being and the urgency of the transformative change required right across society. Biodiversity loss should not only be halted but reversed, with wide-scale recovery of nature evidenced by 2030.

Q10 Big Ideas

Wildlife Trusts campaign: The development of a 'Nature Recovery Network' set in law for the future protection and enhancement of the environment. A Nature Recovery Network is a joined-up system of places important for wildlife. It is a spatial plan that identifies and creates the corridors and areas of habitat wildlife needs to move in response to climate change. It will connect wild places, help to protect and enhance existing natural spaces, and bring more wildlife into peoples' lives. A legally-binding network for nature would mean that wildlife is prioritised when managing our land and planning our towns and villages.

At a local level, Local Nature Recovery Maps should be produced to inform future planning, turning nature's recovery from an aspiration to a reality.

RSPB campaign:

Northern Ireland Climate Act: Given the urgency of the situation and with countries around the world committing to take action to limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C, it is unacceptable there is no specific climate change legislation in Northern Ireland. Climate change must certainly be one of the key areas covered in the Strategy but the proposed outcome to simply reduce greenhouse gas emissions does not go far enough; to be meaningful, there must be a clear target to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2045. If we are serious about tackling climate change, we cannot rely on the other countries of the UK to cut their emissions while not setting binding targets for ourselves. Introducing a Northern Ireland Climate Act with legally binding targets to cut emissions should be a headline measure of the Strategy and a priority for a newly-formed Assembly.

Nature Networks: Nature is in trouble in Northern Ireland, with habitat loss and fragmentation among the key drivers of biodiversity loss. The Strategy will not achieve the outcome of halting biodiversity loss without addressing these drivers. We must restore our best sites for nature to favourable condition. Welcome the Strategy's focus on this, but we also need to ensure they are connected through a network of habitats outside protected sites where wildlife can recover and thrive.

An independent Environmental Protection Agency: Northern Ireland is the only area of the UK that does not have an independent EPA and we can see the result in high levels of illegal dumping, the persecution of threatened species, and the poor condition of our protected sites. Good policies and legislation will only be effective if they are properly enforced so the main priority for environmental governance in Northern Ireland should be the introduction of an independent Environmental Protection Agency.

Public Money for Public Goods: the PDD acknowledges the importance of agriculture for our environment and that how we farm can have positive and negative effects. However, this is not proposed as one of the key areas, despite the fact that agriculture is responsible for 27% of our carbon emissions. In order to help farmers combat climate change and restore nature in our countryside, farming subsidies should provide an incentive for farmers to farm in a way that helps protect the environment and support the objectives of the Strategy.

Q11 Other Comments/Contributions

Wildlife Trusts campaign:

More protection of badger sets and prosecution of people who deliberately destroy them

Farming subsidies should provide an incentive for farmers to farm in a way that helps protect the environment and support the objectives of the Strategy.

Truly sustainable fisheries regulations to ensure recovery of our wild fish populations.

Embed a 'biodiversity net gain' principle for housing and infrastructure developments – putting in place planning policies that make it mandatory for new developments to leave biodiversity in a better state than before.

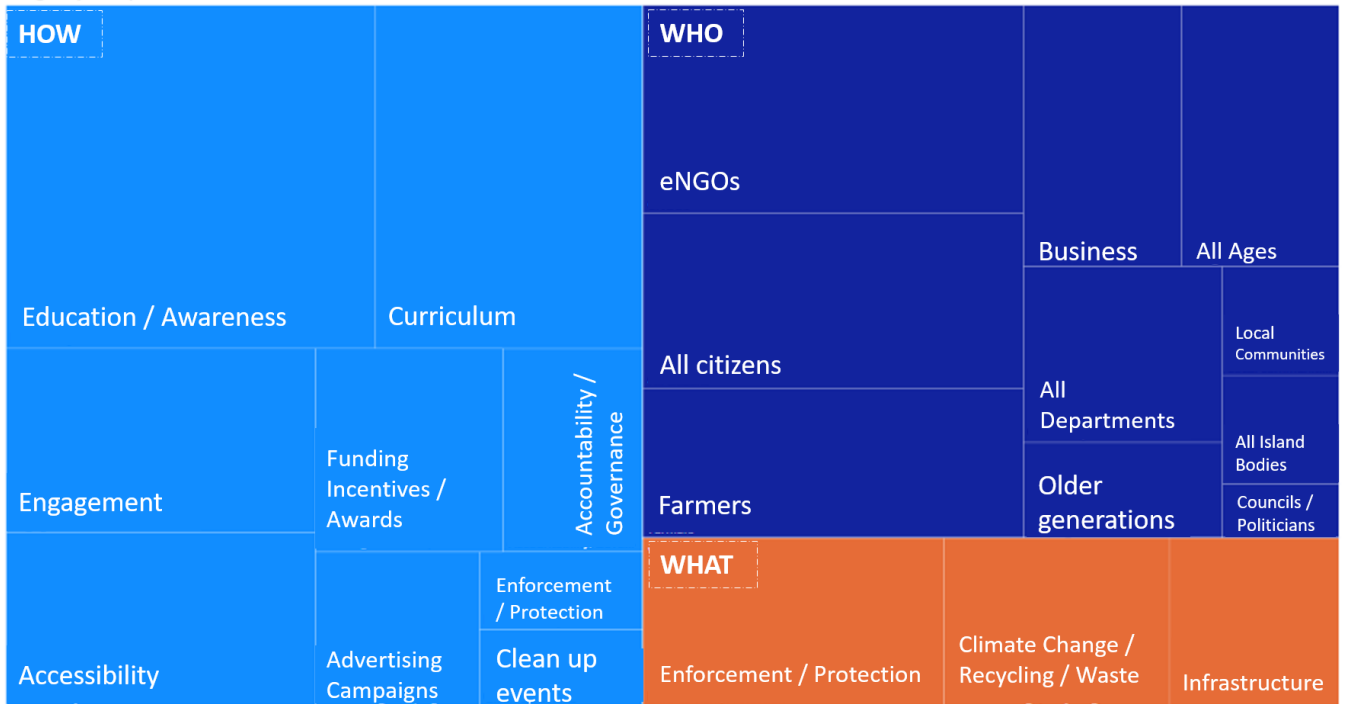
Take action on the climate crisis – we need plans to accelerate the decarbonisation of our economy particularly by investing in nature-based solutions including a significant increase in native tree planting and peatland restoration.

Include environmental awareness as part of the school curriculum and provide funding to make it easier for schools to take pupils on regular trips to natural spaces.

Northern Ireland needs an independent watchdog body to scrutinise government progress, and sufficient resources and funding to implement the plan fully.

Assorted Treemaps

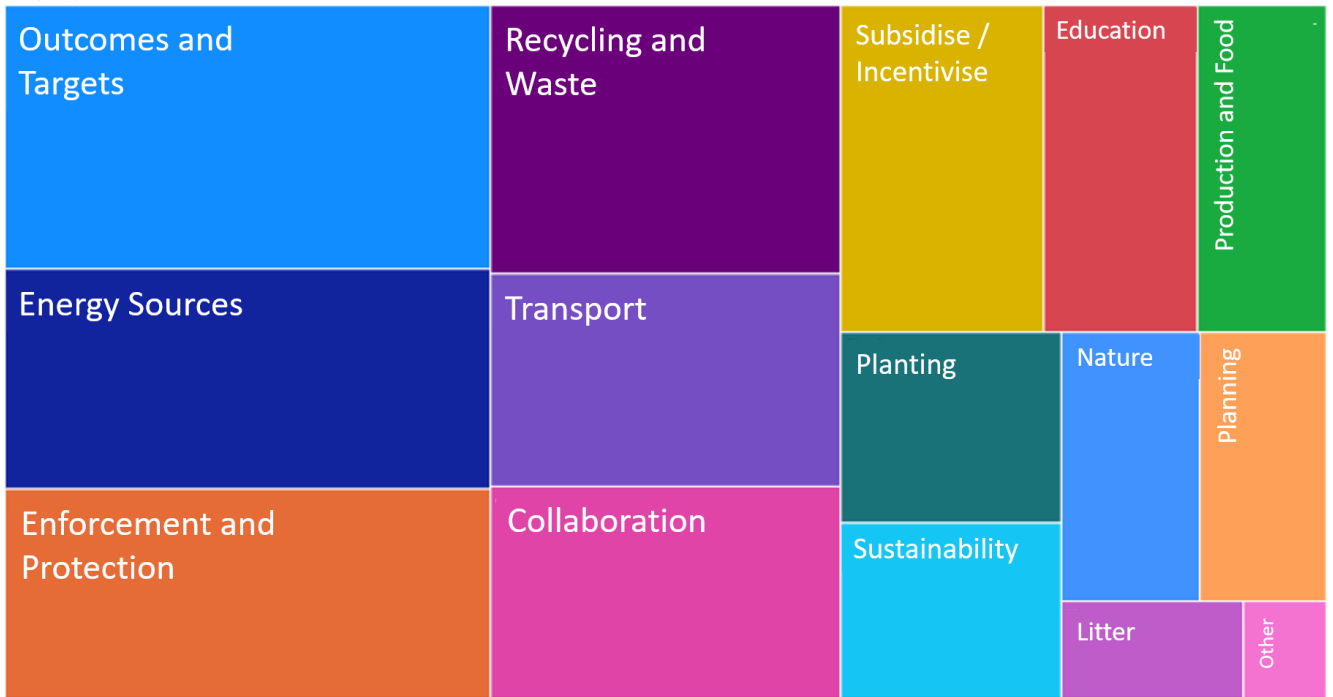
Q4: Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Engagement strategic theme?



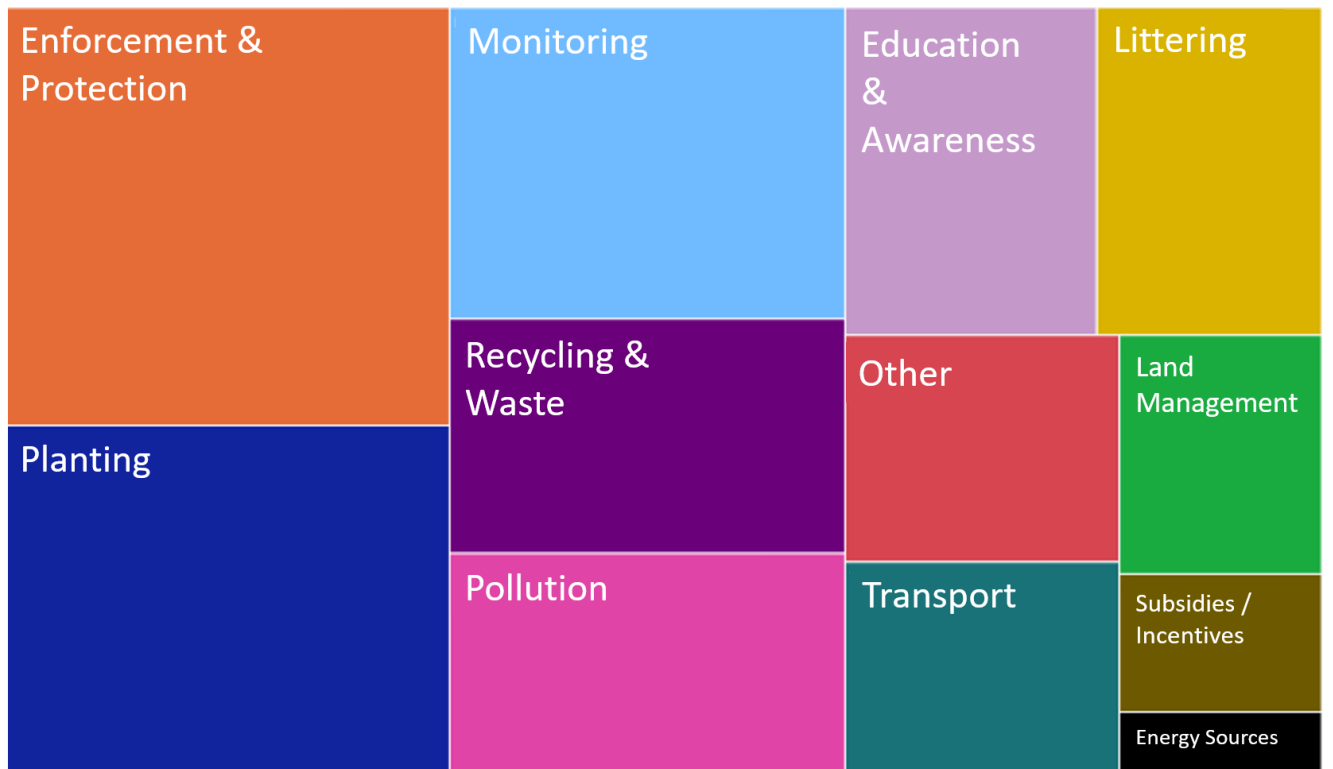
Q5: Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Prosperity strategic theme?



Q6: Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Efficiency strategic theme?



Q7: Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Quality strategic theme?



Q9: Do you agree that these are appropriate draft outcomes for the Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland?

