

Annual Review 06/07



Northern Ireland Environment Link



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the forum and networking body for organisations interested in the environment of Northern Ireland. It assists members to develop views on issues affecting the environment and to influence policy and practice impacting on the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland.

This report is laid out according to the main aims identified for NIEL in its strategic plan. It includes the major activities and accomplishments for the year within each theme. More detailed information is available in a comprehensive report on activities undertaken to address the main objectives within each theme.

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Chairman's Report



"I believe we can say that 'we have made a difference' and that we show every indication of continuing to do so."

This time last year I expressed optimism in looking forward to my second year as Chair of the Executive Committee of NIEL and this optimism has proven to be sound. NIEL has continued to develop its role as a major voice for the environment and its activity as a vital and effective Link for members and their interests.

Continuation of a sound funding base, thanks primarily to the Environment and Heritage Service and also to the Esmee Fairbairn Trust, and the enthusiasm, skills and efforts of our immensely hard-working and dedicated staff have enabled NIEL to deliver our Implementation Plan in full. This is, indeed, impressive and sets high standards for the future. Visible outputs which demonstrate both the quality and the quantity of our work and achievements include the Fact Sheets which have been very well-received; NIEL News which is widely distributed and much acclaimed; the NIEL web-site which is proving extremely popular; and our copious and comprehensive response to a large number of consultation documents and requests for comment. The latter take not just a high level of expertise, but also a great deal of staff time. The welcome advent of devolved government carries with it major implications for expansion of workloads. Link organisations

elsewhere in the UK have dedicated Assembly/Parliamentary staff and the Executive Committee recognises a major management task in all of this and the possible need for further resource. The 'Policy' section of this Report demonstrates the basis of our pride in the work of NIEL in this context. This is paralleled by the work of staff more directly in response to our Members' needs and to the importance of Networking. Meetings, conferences, other events and also, publications in this area of our work have proved to be innovative, exciting and inspiring. The fact that we can report an increase in membership as well as in more general involvement is significant in a sector where there is considerable variety in terms of size and remit of organisations.

The Director's Report which follows points to interesting and exciting times ahead. We are right to move forward with confidence but also, require vigilance as to our capacity in relation to the likely task. I hope you can take the time necessary to study this Report and to continue in your support of NIEL over the coming year.

Finally, and echoing my closing comments last year, I wish to thank and express appreciation to the members of the Executive Committee, the Director and the Officers of Northern Ireland Environment Link. I believe we can say that 'we have made a difference' and that we show every indication of continuing to do so. I commend this Annual Report to you.

Pat Jess
Chairman

Director's Report



The second year of secure and substantial funding, and the first year with a complete staff complement, has seen NIEL much better able to meet the wishes of its members and to play an increasingly significant role in promoting the environment. In particular we have been able to take on a much greater role in policy promotion at several levels – with political parties, local authorities and several civil service departments in addition to our continuing role with the Department of the Environment.

As we enter the year 2007-08 some things have been decided with regard to governance issues. The Assembly has taken up the reins of government and with the launch of the NI Sustainable Development Strategy OFMDFM has been charged with delivering a more sustainable future for Northern Ireland. We now await the publication of the Review of Environmental Governance Report and further steps in the Review of Public Administration. We began last year with many people still expressing doubt over the impacts of climate change and whether people really are a significant cause; by the end of the year little doubt remained in respectable scientific circles and increasingly among the public and politicians. It is now imperative that we seriously and urgently begin to address the issue. Public profile and acceptance of the importance of environmental issues has never been higher, and the opportunities this affords us in the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland are great.

Not that all is ideal. There are major conflicts around the way the countryside will be developed in the future and the full implementation of the

Review of Public Administration, including the much anticipated community planning functions, may now be delayed for years. We have yet to see how the Assembly regards environmental issues and whether the finances will follow the commitments in the Sustainable Development Strategy. While we eagerly await the findings of the Review of Environmental Governance we have less confidence that the Assembly will accord it sufficient priority and funding to make it the resounding success it needs to be.

"...the opportunities for NIEL to make an important contribution to the future of Northern Ireland's environment have never been greater."

As ever, the words give us hope, but the coming months and years will tell if the words will be followed by sufficient action and commitment to bring about the changes in behaviour which need to follow. As we enter the next year and plan for the future with the development of a new five year plan, we feel that the challenges remain significant and the opportunities for NIEL to make an important contribution to the future of Northern Ireland's environment have never been greater.

Sue Christie
Director

Strategic Leadership

To enhance the credibility of NIEL's role through instigating debate and discussion amongst its members and those whom it seeks to influence

Conferences

NIEL held two major public conferences during the year. The Stakeholder Forum and Annual General Meeting, (*Making it Real – Sustainable Development in Northern Ireland*) held on 20 June at the Spires Conference Centre in Belfast, looked at the new Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland and included workshops investigating how the various recommendations of the Strategy could be implemented. The second conference, held jointly with the National Trust, investigated aspects around land-use planning (*Planning and the Future of the Countryside in NI*) and was held at NICVA on 28 November 2006. Both were very well attended by approximately 70 people each and were positively received. Those attending included representatives of government, non-government bodies, NDPBs, academics and, of course, NIEL members. The latter conference resulted in the production of *Planning Challenges for Northern Ireland's Countryside – An Agenda for Action* which will be launched in June 2007 and used for policy promotion.

Implementation Plan

The NIEL Implementation Plan for the year was fully delivered, with all targets met and many exceeded. Work concentrated on a number of major policy themes, most of which had specific task forces overseeing the work, and all of which were the subject of meetings with government, politicians and other bodies. Such meetings early in the year tended to concentrate on the recommendations from *The Way Ahead* policy document produced in January 2006, and later in the year more attention

was paid to the implementation of the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy. The underlying theme of all of these meetings was that the environment requires consideration in the workings of all parts of Government and that NIEL is able to provide information and contacts to help them address the issues pertaining to them.

Representation

The profile of NIEL has continued to rise due to these meetings as well as involvement in a number of committees and organisations (some 24 bodies during the year had NIEL representation), attendance at conferences (34) and speaking engagements (23). As the staff complement has increased the number of such events that can be attended has increased; with significant details of these events reported in *NIEL News*.

Consultation Comments

Comments on governmental consultation documents continued to occupy a significant amount of time, with the Policy Officer now taking on most of this work. Thirty five documents were commented on, including major input to the reform of water services, planning, renewable energy, transport, marine and agriculture policy. Some of this work, such as comments on the Marine Bill, was directly related to work by task forces, but most of these documents continue to arrive with little or no notice and require considerable research from members and in house to provide clear, concise and useful comments which can be used by members to inform their input.

Examples of Committees, Presentations and Consultation Responses

Representation on Committees	Presentations Delivered	Responses Submitted
Working Groups on PPS1 and 18	SD & Local Authorities 19 May	Marine Bill
Waste Prevention Forum	PPS14, RTPI Conference 25 May	DARD Rural Strategy
SD Stakeholder Forum	REGNI Presentation 28 Jul	Water Order
Strangford Lough Mgmt Com	Energy & Las NILGA 25 Oct	Comments on the CSR and Programme for Government
NI Climate Change Impacts	CWIF Conferences 14, 22 Nov	Sustainable Development in Public SNI Sector Procurement
Invasive Aliens Forum	ARENA Conference 6 Feb	Environmental Liability Directive

Policy

To influence regional, national and international policy which can impact on the natural and built environment

Task Forces

Much of NIEL's policy work concentrates on major policy themes identified by the Executive and agreed at the AGM. Most of this thematic work is supported by specific task forces or working groups. Thematic areas originally identified for 2006-07 were: Environmental Protection Coalition, Freshwater, Marine, Planning, Sustainable Development and Integration. Some task forces are convened and serviced by NIEL, but others are convened and serviced independently with strong NIEL involvement; some are known and function officially as NIEL Task Forces whereas others have different titles or ways of working. During the year two additional work areas achieved prominence and groups were formed; the NI Archaeology Forum and the Resource Forum, the latter being a revitalisation of the Waste to Resource Partnership which had been inactive for a few years. On reviewing the work it was determined that the Sustainable Development theme was being adequately addressed through Sustainable NI and by staff and that Integration was best dealt with as a 'cross curricular' theme within all other groups.

Archaeology

At the suggestion of the Council for British Archaeology, a new NIEL member during the year, NIEL convened a meeting of a number of those interested in archaeology in Northern Ireland. This meeting, in October, was well attended by some 20 people from the governmental, voluntary, academic and private sectors. The group has formed the NI Archaeology Forum and continued to meet, including a workshop on the needs of the sector in December, and has developed a 'mission and aims' for the group with plans to carry out specific activities to promote archaeology up the political and public agendas in Northern Ireland over the next year.

Climate Change

The profile and seriousness of climate change impacts and the pressing need for amelioration attained a very high public and political profile during the year. Building upon a showing of the Al Gore film *An Inconvenient Truth* in September, a group consisting of both environment and development NGOs has been meeting to develop a

joint plan of action. The group understands that although many of the most significant and unpleasant aspects of climatic change may not impact upon us directly, it surely is our responsibility to those throughout the world who will be affected negatively, particularly the most underprivileged, to act locally. This group is still in its formative stages, working out its political and public messages and determining its future relationship with the UK wide Stop Climate Chaos campaign.

Environmental Protection Coalition

Work on this group largely concentrated on providing evidence to the Review of Environmental Governance which began in February 2006. The final report is expected in June 2007. During the latter half of 2006 a 'postcard campaign' was run by the group which resulted in over 2000 postcards supporting an EPA for NI being sent to the political parties by the public.

Freshwater

Following the successful *Maximising the Benefits* conference run by the Task Force in March 2006 the work of the group has continued to concentrate on implementation of the Water Framework Directive and attempting to ensure the involvement of stakeholders in this. A week of activities, focussing on public participation in and awareness of wetland issues, was organised to celebrate World Wetlands Day (2 February 2007). The events were funded by 26 organisations with an interest in wetlands.

Activities included a border tracking tour by The Wetlanders – a group of super-sized wetland animals, a series of focus meetings with angling, farming and tourist representatives and a policy round-up at the Rivers Agency office in Derry. The Wetlanders visited several border towns and schools and were accompanied by a survey team who interviewed more than 100 members of the public.



Policy ...

Marine

The Marine Task Force (MTF), serviced by the Joint Marine Programme for the first part of the year and thereafter by NIEL, lobbied for legislation on marine issues to be taken forward through a Marine Bill and worked with other groups in NI and GB to obtain funding for marine officers to promote the Bill. The MTF organised a trip to Rathlin Island on World Oceans' Day for local politicians. A Vision Document and the first of a series of Marine Bulletins were produced. Funding for two Marine Officers for NI was granted in March 2007 with funding from a group of charitable trusts through a UK wide bid coordinated by Wildlife and Countryside Link. It is hoped that these officers, to be based with UWT and RSPB/WWF, will be in post by the early summer. The Task Force also commissioned a legal critique of the Marine Bill and a study into the governance options for a marine management organisation.



Planning

The main output for this Task Force was the joint National Trust and NIEL conference on **Planning and the Future of the Countryside** on 28 November 2007. There was a great deal of controversy over the publication of PPS14 on Sustainable Development in the Countryside, and NIEL had a prominent role in attempting to ensure that the fundamental principle of a need for greater control on building in the countryside was not overwhelmed by the objections to the detail of the PPS and the way it was introduced. The PPS is in judicial review with a result expected sometime in 2007. The Conference was an attempt to air the issues from all aspects in a way that encouraged constructive debate rather than rhetoric. The output of the Conference is an 'Agenda' for planning entitled **Planning Challenges for Northern Ireland's Countryside**



– **An Agenda for Action** which will form the basis of policy work in the area over the coming year.

Resource Forum

The revised Waste Management Strategy, **Towards Resource Management**, was launched in March of 2006. NIEL has been involved in a number of working groups over this year, including the Waste Prevention Forum and the Communications and Learning Forum, both parts of the implementation structure for the Strategy. The latter has been particularly active in the latter half of the year and NIEL has been servicing its meetings. NIEL convened the Waste to Resource Partnership for some years but the group had not been active for about three years. After canvassing members and holding an initial meeting it was agreed that there is a role for this group in helping to deliver Strategy and several meetings have been held, resulting in a formal 'mission and aim' for the group and enthusiasm for future action, with a change in name to the Resource Forum.

Sustainable Development

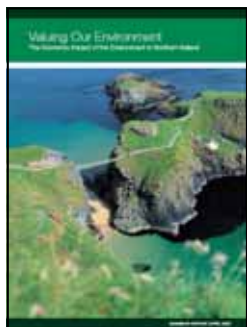
NIEL continued to play a major role in the development of the Sustainable Development Strategy (launched in May 2006) and its Implementation Plan (produced in November 2006) and other aspects of the Strategy through a number of committees formed by OFMDFM, including stakeholder involvement, a communications strategy and development of indicators. This work will continue, encouraging those involved in the Strategy to give adequate priority to environmental matters, fully involve all stakeholders in implementing the Strategy and Plan, and encouraging all Government Departments and Agencies to fully adopt the Strategy and recognise that it can be an aid and powerful force for integration in their work. In addition, NIEL has continued to manage Sustainable NI which has been carrying out much work on practical aspects of sustainable development.

Work on sustainable development connects very closely with the work on the Review of Public Administration, specifically the aspects of Community Planning, which were a particular focus for the year.

Policy ...

Green NGOs

In addition, NIEL is a member of the 'G9' group of Chief Executives of environmental organisations. During the year this group, supported by the EHS and spearheaded by the National Trust, prepared a document on the economic value of the environment to NI entitled *Valuing Our Environment: The Economic Impact of the Environment of Northern Ireland* which was launched in April 2007.



Strategic Policy Review

A major part of our Strategic Plan and our bid to the Esmee Fairbairn Trust was a proposal for an Environmental Trends Report. This proposal has been under development and consideration for some time, and builds upon the work that NIEL has done on strategic analysis over the years – the *Environmental Strategy for Northern Ireland* in 1996, *Worth the Paper?* in 2003 and *The Way Ahead* in 2006. After much thought, and reviewing other publications and plans which are being developed (a State of the Environment Report by EHS due at the end of 2007; Indicators for Sustainable Development being developed by OFMDFM) it was decided that the best way forward is not 'another trends report' but rather a strategic policy document. The other planned documents will not be looking at governmental policies and the successes and failures of them with regard to the environment, nor will they be taking an 'external' view of what is needed to address our environmental problems; this then is a major role for the NIEL document. It will involve members contributing analysis of policies in their particular areas of expertise and proposing activities and policies which can then form the basis for their own and NIEL policy campaigns. The first edition is due in the autumn/winter of 2007; it is hoped that we will be able to have a stable enough political landscape by that stage to make significant and useful proposals for future policy work.

Policy Seminars with EHS

During the year a new system of meetings with Environment Heritage Service (EHS) was instituted. We held an annual conference on *Landscape - An Integrated Approach* on 24 May 2006 for NIEL members and staff and EHS staff throughout the EHS Directorates. Talks to set the scene were followed by discussion groups looking at how we can best work towards a more integrated view of the landscape and methods that we need to put in place to ensure that this resource is not damaged. Semi-annual meetings with the Board of EHS have been replaced by bilateral meetings of either NIEL staff or staff plus members with EHS Directors to discuss aspects particularly relevant to their area of interest. These meetings are held at least annually and supplemented with less formal meetings as required. The NIEL Director and Chairman meet the EHS Chief Executive at least twice each year to discuss progress.



Policy Promotion

NIEL again revisited its 'public' role within the Executive and decided that it should have a somewhat higher profile through promotion of policy issues to the media and public. A certain degree of awareness of NIEL is commensurate with, indeed required for, the role it has as strategic leader and voice for the sector. NIEL is not a high profile organisation and should not seek publicity for itself, but should engage in media liaison about particular issues, such as PPS14, the Review of Environmental Governance, budget implications and sustainable development where a common voice promoting environmental issues is desirable. Accordingly press releases have been issued, especially regarding events, and media interviews given on appropriate topics throughout the year.

Networking

To achieve a fully informed and co-ordinated environmental sector

Members' Events

A number of members' events were held during the year, including meetings looking at policy consultations, funding and campaigning. Such meetings are convened when the topic is particularly relevant, when an appropriate speaker becomes available or when the Executive or a member organisation requests a meeting on a particular topic.

Database

Over the year a great deal of effort has continued to be expended in updating a comprehensive database of organisations and individuals in Northern Ireland with an environmental interest. Cross referenced and categorised, the database of over 2000 entries allows contacting of appropriate organisations and individuals for specific events, activities and publications. However, constant updating is required which takes considerable time and effort.

Health

Liaison with members primarily interested in health (The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and Institute of Public Health in Ireland) resulted in a joint conference looking at **Public Health and Sustainability** which was held on 23 May 2006. The linkages between the environment, sustainable development and public health agendas are strong and cooperative working is felt to make the messages of both more understandable and evocative for the public. Much more work is required in this area but has not been possible due to the busy agendas of the two members involved.

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

NIEL has continued to support the work of the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG) in attempting to expand its role in Northern Ireland. There were two joint conferences held in Northern Ireland to promote the work of the Federation and encourage more bodies in Northern Ireland to get involved in local

food production and promotion. The conferences (**Food, Health and the Environment**) on 29 April 2006 and (**Growing for Life**) on 21 November 2006 also aimed to raise awareness of the importance of locally grown and marketed food and to encourage local groups to become involved in food-related projects. A 'map' (**Growing for Life in Northern Ireland**) of all the groups and markets involved in local food production and distribution was prepared and launched at the November conference. Over 40 organisations were highlighted, with details of what they supply and means to contact them. This has been highly popular and the 2000 copies printed have been distributed. This work is supported by the Awards for All and the Ulster Garden Villages. During the early part of 2007 NIEL assisted FCFCG in preparing a bid to the Big Lottery for funding to continue to expand this project over the next five years.



Sustainable Northern Ireland

NIEL continued to service Sustainable Northern Ireland (SNI) over the year, helping it to complete the work on Community Visioning for Castlereagh funded by the Castlereagh Local Strategic Partnership and to deliver three projects promoting sustainable waste management. All four projects have been completed on time and to budget, with final reports available. In March 2007 SNI employed a Sustainable Development Officer funded for one year by the Department of Environment and the Environmental Health sections of the Local Authorities. Her job will be to help local authorities recognise and understand the implications of the 'Duty for Sustainable Development' and to assist them to implement the Sustainable Development Strategy.

Networking ...

Castlereagh Community Visioning Project

The Castlereagh Visioning Project was funded by the Castlereagh Local Strategy Partnership. The original funding period was for a year, starting in October 2004; the contract was extended on two occasions, terminating in October 2006. The Project was managed by Sustainable Northern Ireland.

The overall aim of the Project was to work with five areas within the Castlereagh Borough to support each community in developing a community vision. The five communities that participated in the Project were Ballybeen, Belvoir, Cregagh, Dundonald and Castlereagh.

The Project resulted in several tangible outcomes, namely:

- Community Action Plans
- Two murals in Ballybeen
- A Visions sculpture in Moneyreagh
- A good practice document circulated to Councils and other agencies concerning community visioning and community planning

In addition to these tangible outcomes that are likely to continue to have an impact for some time, there were benefits gained for communities and individuals through the process of Community Visioning, networking, capacity building and raising awareness of the concept and actuality of Community Visioning.



The final report from the project is a document called **Putting the Community into Community Planning** which provides a summary of the potential for community planning and how it could best be implemented to have maximum benefit for communities.

Faith Waste Project

Funded by Belfast City Council through the Better Belfast scheme (from Landfill tax credits), the aims of the Faith Waste Project were to:

- Educate and promote waste minimisation among Belfast's faith groups and to reduce their waste
- Raise awareness of the inter-relationships of the various environmental and social / economic aspects of re-use
- Establish linkages between the faith communities and groups involved in social projects to promote re-use (e.g. charity shops)
- Encourage people to recognise that items which are no longer of use to them can have a productive use for others, either at home or abroad

Over the 12 months of the programme we have contacted and networked with more than 20 Faith Communities within the Belfast City Council area; encouraged the concept of '**reduce, re-use, recycle**' and highlighted the aim of designing a waste management programme tailored to their specific needs which can be delivered to the faith community by a member of the group. Numerous field study visits to recycling centres were arranged as well as workshops to raise awareness and highlight good practice. Newsletters have successfully allowed exchange of information, updates from groups and networking.

Swap Shop Networking

A second project was designed to identify and build networks among all those groups currently involved in using materials that might otherwise go to landfill. The goods might be used locally, for example through refurbishment and provision to those in social need, sold locally to raise money to help others or they may be sent abroad to help people in less advantaged countries. We have been actively networking and encouraging effective partnerships amongst numerous charity shops which are primarily concerned with the re-use of goods and the hope is that together they can campaign together and as one stronger voice.

Networking ...

Choose to Reuse

A successful bid to the Community Waste Innovation Fund has enabled staff at Sustainable NI to develop a printed information pack to encourage waste reduction and reuse across Northern Ireland by identifying a specific reuse message - give products for which you no longer have a use a chance to be of use to others. This poster and accompanying leaflet with contact details for charities, councils and other reuse facilities was launched at a series of three regional conferences promoting the reuse message in



November 2006.

Together the three latter projects were designed to look at how people in Northern Ireland can become more aware of how important it is to view all materials as valuable. Our planet is finite in its resources and we should use them sustainably for the good of people locally and globally, now and in the future. They provide a good example in just one field of how people can live more sustainable lifestyles.

Environmental Education Forum

The Environmental Education Forum (EEF) continues to grow from strength to strength, with a full programme of conferences, meetings and publications. *Education for Sustainable Development - A resource guide for teachers and group leaders* was produced in September 2006 which provides details of the work done by Forum members in promoting and delivering environmental and sustainable development education in NI. Three newsletters were developed and distributed to all schools in Northern Ireland and a Youth Services edition went to 2,000 groups. There were two EEF conferences held in 2006, one at St Columb's Park House, Derry and the other at Oxford Island. There were five Forum meetings held this year as well as five Management Committee meetings.



Every year the Forum runs Education for Sustainable Development days at all of Northern Ireland's University establishments. These are delivered by EEF member groups and are aimed at trainee teachers and PGCE students. In 2006/07 11 such days were run covering approx 800 teachers. A great deal of networking and promotion of member programmes was carried out during the year with EEF staff attending and inputting into a variety of conferences, meetings, working groups, Forums, and training days. This networking resulted in 17 new member organisations joining the EEF over this period. The EEF also had a new website come online during this period (www.eefni.org.uk) and regularly sends out e-bulletin updates to keep members up to date on important sector news, information, events, jobs and training.



NICVA Environmental Policy Forum

NIEL chairs the NICVA Environmental Policy Forum which meets twice each year to discuss environmental issues of particular interest to the voluntary and community sector. Meetings in September and March concentrated on sustainable development and waste management, but any areas of concern are discussed in open meetings. The main output for this group was a series of articles in *NICVA News*, *Scope* and the *Community NI website* on how community and voluntary organisations can contribute to sustainable development in their own operations and their employees' and members' home lives. These articles were commissioned from NIEL members or others with expertise and have been compiled into our second Fact Sheet for the year, *Steps to Sustainability*. This was produced in March 2007 and distributed to all NICVA members with the financial support of NICVA.

Information

To have a better informed membership by providing an effective means of collecting, processing and disseminating relevant information on environmental matters to and from members and government

Fact Sheets

Two Fact Sheets were produced during the year, *Introducing Community Planning to Northern Ireland* in November 2006 which received widespread praise and *Steps to Sustainability* in March 2007. Work also began on two new Fact Sheets for 2007-08 on *Climate Change and Energy* and *The Historic Environment*.



Conferences

Conferences are a major aspect of our information provision, and there were several held during the year with a number of partners and for a variety of audiences, including: *Food, Health and the Environment* (29 April 2006), *Public Health and Sustainability* (23 May 2006), *Landscape - An Integrated Approach* (24 May 2006), *Making it Real - Sustainable Development in NI* (20 June 2006), *Growing for Life* (21 November 2006), *Planning and the Future of the Countryside in NI* (28 November 2006). Reports are prepared for all conferences and are available on the website together with the conference presentations; occasionally specific documents are also prepared and used for framing future work.

NIEL News

NIEL News continued to be produced monthly to great acclaim and was distributed to all EHS staff via their intranet as well as to all NIEL members.

An attempt to get all government departments to pay a subscription to receive *NIEL News*, as well as the Fact Sheets and other periodic documents was unsuccessful despite a well received introductory free trial. Despite this it was decided by the Executive that greater dissemination of *NIEL News* was still worthwhile, and a continued dissemination of *NIEL News* to all Departments was agreed, together with MLAs and select media.

E bulletins

E bulletins continued to be produced as and when required between *NIEL News* issues, given sufficient material and their deadlines.

Members' Directory

A revised Members' Directory was produced in July 2006 and the Membership Pack was updated as appropriate.

Website

The NIEL website has proved to be extremely popular, with **563,646** hits and **43,864** unique visits during the year. Visits increased month on month from **2254** in April 2006 to **6161** in March 2007 and the most popular areas were 'Publications', 'News' and 'Members'. The website has both public and members only sections, and provides access to all NIEL publications, contacts for all members and a variety of information and news items.

Non Members' Survey

In the summer we undertook a survey of organisations in the voluntary environmental sector beyond our membership base to assess awareness and opinions of our work and how we are perceived in the wider environmental sector. Over 100 organisations were targeted and 22 (such as the Energy Saving Trust and Belfast Healthy Cities) took part and raised a number of issues relevant to NIEL which we are addressing including raising our profile and strengthening links with the wider sector.

Membership

To increase membership and provide efficient and effective services which meet members' needs

Membership Drive

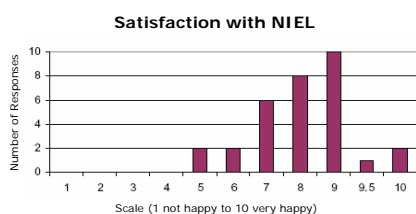
Our drive for new members continued, and NIEL ended the year with 47 Full members and 55 Associates, with the drive continuing and a number of other organisations targeted for membership.

New Members

New Full Members are: Lough Neagh Partnership, Belfast Hills Partnership, Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland, Institute of Public Health in Ireland, Grassroots Conservation Group, The Rural College, British Council Northern Ireland, Community Technical Aid, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Northern Ireland.

Members' Survey

The second annual members' survey was undertaken and again revealed a high degree of satisfaction with NIEL by its membership. Suggestions made for improvement included: more focus on influencing policy and enhancing public awareness, which will be addressed as appropriate.



The Survey of Members has identified that the Full Members

- represent over 90,000 individuals
- represent 255 subsidiary groups
- have an annual turnover of over £43 million and
- manage over 230,000 acres of land

Service to members continues to be a top priority, and we are always open to suggestions as to how best improve our service. The recommendations from the Membership Survey are crucial to this and we do our best to provide a prompt and efficient service to all members.

Of course the prime benefit to members is being part of a coordinated voice on policy matters and being a major contributor to determining our activities and publications. Some members get more from their membership than others; the more someone participates the more they will get out of their membership and we are constantly looking for members to become more involved with the organisation through participating on task forces or the Executive Committee.

What our members say about us

"Membership of NIEL has been a major benefit to the Council for British Archaeology as it keeps us in touch with developments across the environmental sector in Northern Ireland, provides us with an additional dimension in relation to our own UK policy development, and helps us to influence issues with which we are concerned through a respected and influential organisation based 'on the ground' "

Mike Heyworth, Director, Council for British Archaeology

"Although we have only been a member since 2006, I am already glad to say that membership has made a difference in terms of networking, promotion of our services and providing us with resources and up to date information on a diverse range of topics."

Noel Elliott, Manager, Field Studies Council

Membership ...

Full Members

Voluntary organisations whose aims include promoting the conservation of the environment of Northern Ireland.



Associate Members

Statutory organisations, companies or individuals with environmental interests.



David Boyd
Peter Christie
Robin Curry
Edel Fingleton
Jean Forbes
Bill Foster
Neil Galway
Frances Green
Lynn Greer
Grace Hassard
Isabel Hood
Ian Humphreys
Brian Jack
Tom Jennings
Pat Jess
David Knott
Ken McGregor

Gemma McHugh
Jim McAdam
William Methven
Heather Moorhead
Julian Orford
Karl Partridge
Marcus Patton
Gordon Reid
Jim Saunders
Gary Sims
Liz Smyth
Laurence Speight
Jude Stephens
Maia Taylor
Sacha Workman
Primrose Wilson
Tom Woolley

Internal Processes

To put in place an operational plan and performance management system to enable members, funders and other stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of NIEL in implementing its plan and achieving its stated outcomes

Executive and Sub-committees

Following a very busy first year for the Executive and its sub-committees work has matured into a more settled state. The Executive agreed that the original four committees should be merged into two; *Strategic, Information and Membership* and *Finance and Human Resources*; to maximise the efficacy of members' input. This has been in force for most of the year and has worked well. Each committee meets between Executive Meetings and reports to the Executive, leaving that body clear to concentrate on strategic planning and monitoring. The Committee looked at its training needs and a paper was presented. This information backed up the earlier members' survey result that NIEL is not seen as nor desired to be a training provider, but rather it should signpost training which is already being offered. The exceptions are in specific areas where NIEL is able to arrange a Members' Meeting on a particular topic which will have positive benefits for those attending.

Strategic Plan

In March 2007 the Executive Committee and staff attended a 'Strategic Planning Day' at Kilbroney Centre in Rostrevor to review progress during the year, to take a close look at the plans for the coming year and to develop our Strategic Plan for 2008 – 2013. It was agreed by all that progress during the year had been excellent, with NIEL truly taking on the role envisaged in the original Strategic Plan. The new Plan will be further developed and submitted to EHS for a bid for further funding after this initial three year period.

Staff

In addition to having our full complement of staff in place, we were assisted by a number of short term staff or volunteers. Michelle McKay came in as a student from the Gibson Institute, but then continued work on the FCFCG project, developed the Map, worked on both conferences, worked on other publications and helped out with Sustainable NI projects. Roisin Hinds, Maedhbh McCann and Ian Miller carried out student placements from the MSc on Sustainable Development course at the Gibson Institute at Queens University Belfast and worked on future fact sheets. Lesley Ann Reid was with us for a month's placement from Stranmillis University and Clare O'Neill worked one day per

week for several months on a variety of tasks. We are extremely grateful to all of them for their hard work and dedication.

Funding and Finances

NIEL was delighted to receive word in May that our application to the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation to support the core work of NIEL for the coming three years was successful, and indeed included a commitment for two further years to extend the support for five years to 2011. The theme of the application was helping to protect Northern Ireland's environment during the coming period of great change in terms of governance and practical changes and includes the promotion of environmental policy issues through the Assembly, Review of Public Administration and Review of Environmental Governance.

The accounts show a surplus on the year of £39,524, with a balanced budget prepared for 2007 – 2008. With this year's surplus NIEL Reserves have now reached the Charity Commissioners' recommended of three to six months operating expenses.

Executive Committee

Chair	Pat Jess
Vice Chairs	Isabel Hood Diane Ruddock, National Trust
Treasurer	Jim Saunders, Mourne Heritage Trust
Secretary	Ben Simon, Forest of Belfast

Ian Cole	Tidy NI
Gerry Darby	Lough Neagh Partnership
Rita Harkin	Ulster Architectural Heritage Society
Gareth Harper	Rural Community Network
Tom Jennings	Ulster Federation of Rambling Clubs
Fiona Johnson	Action Renewables
Eamonn Keaveney	ARENA Network
William Mullan	International Tree Foundation NI
Lizzy Pinkerton	Belfast Hills Partnership
Murray Watt	NI Tenants Action Programme

Staff

Director	Sue Christie
Policy Officer	Seamus og Gallagher
Membership and Info Officer	Kelly Muldoon
Finance Officer	Sandra Kilpatrick
Office Manager	Marie-anna Vischer
Administrative Officer	Iona Meyer
EEF Co-ordinator	Andy Griggs

Summary Financial Statement

YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2007

Directors' Statement on the Summary Financial Statement

The directors present herewith the summary financial statement of Northern Ireland Environment Link for the year ended 31 March 2007 and confirm the following:

- the summary financial statement is not the statutory financial accounts but is a summary of information relating to both the Statement of Financial Activities and the balance sheet
- the full financial statements from which the summary is derived have been externally examined by an independent auditor; and he has provided an unqualified report
- the full annual accounts, the external examiners report and the trustees'/directors' report can be obtained on application to Northern Ireland Environment Link Ltd
- the annual accounts were approved by the Board on 20 June 2007

This directors' statement was approved by the board of directors on 20 June 2007 and signed on its behalf by:

Sue Christie
Secretary

Independent Auditor's Statement to the Members of Northern Ireland Environment Link Ltd

We have examined the summary financial statement of Northern Ireland Environment Link Limited.

Respective responsibilities of directors and auditors

The directors are responsible for preparing the summary financial statement in accordance with applicable law. Our responsibility is to report to you our opinion on the consistency of the summary financial statement with the full annual accounts and Directors' Report, and its compliance with the relevant requirements of Article 259 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and the regulations made thereunder. We also read the other information contained in the summary financial statement and consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the summary financial statement.

Basis of opinion

We conducted our work in accordance with Bulletin 1999/6 "The Auditors' statement on the summary financial statement" issued by the Auditing Practices Board for use in the United Kingdom.

Opinion

In our opinion the summary financial statement is consistent with the full annual accounts and directors' report of Northern Ireland Environment Link Ltd for the year ended 31 March 2007 and complies with the applicable requirements of Article 259 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, and the regulations made thereunder.

Diamond & Skillen

Chartered Accountants and
Registered auditor (20 June 2007),
Sinclair House, 89/101 Royal Avenue, Belfast, BT1 1FE

Northern Ireland Environment Link Ltd
Extracted Statement of Financial Activities (fund breakdown) for
the year ended 31 March 2007

	General Fund (unrestricted) £	Envir. Education Forum (restricted) £	Marine Task Force (restricted) £	Arts Council (Arts Proj) (restricted) £	2007 Totals £	2006 Totals £
Incoming Resources						
Grants	160,960	34,900	7,000	-	202,860	197,813
Subscriptions	14,360	2,772	-	-	17,132	6,050
SNI Servicing & accommodation	17,641	-	-	-	17,641	8,979
Other income	6,823	-	-	-	6,823	2,096
Project income	9,601	25	-	-	9,626	4,126
Investment income	783	-	-	-	783	561
Total incoming resources	210,168	37,697	7,000	0	254,865	219,625
Resources expended						
Employee costs	133,553	21,665	-	-	155,218	129,477
Premises costs	19,360	-	-	-	19,360	23,944
Advertising costs	338	-	-	-	338	3,510
Travel and training costs	1,428	-	-	-	1,428	1,954
General administration costs	15,048	-	-	-	15,048	16,720
Legal and professional fees	881	-	-	-	881	2,261
Programme costs	10,296	3,349	7,100	-	20,745	40,665
Other expenses	676	-	-	-	676	993
Capital expenditure	-	-	-	-	0	11,018
Total resources expended	181,580	25,014	7,100	0	213,694	230,542
Net incoming—(outgoing) resources	28,588	12,683	(100)	-	41,171	(10,917)
Depreciation of fixed assets	(1,747)	-	-	-	(1,747)	(2,251)
Transfer capital expenditure to assets	-	-	-	-	0	11,018
Transfers between funds	12,683	(12,683)	-	-	0	0
Net movement in funds	39,524	0	(100)	-	39,424	(2,150)
Fund balances b/f at 1 April	55,211	0	0	10	55,221	57,371
Fund balances c/f at 31 March	94,735	0	(100)	10	94,645	55,221

Northern Ireland Environment Link Ltd

Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2007

	2007 £	2006 £
Fixed Assets		
Tangible assets	9,902	11,649
Current Assets		
Debtors	1,234	1,580
Cash at bank and in hand	84,640	45,403
	95,776	58,632
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(1,131)	(3,411)
Net assets	94,645	55,221
Accumulated Funds		
<i>Unrestricted income funds:</i>		
General funds	94,735	55,211
	94,735	55,211
<i>Restricted income funds:</i>		
Environment Education Forum (EEF)	-	-
Marine Task Force (MTF)	(100)	-
Arts Council NI—Arts Project	10	10
Total funds	94,645	55,221

The summary financial statement was approved by the Board of Directors on 20 June 2007 and signed on their behalf by:

Pat Jess

Chairman of Directors

Jim Saunders

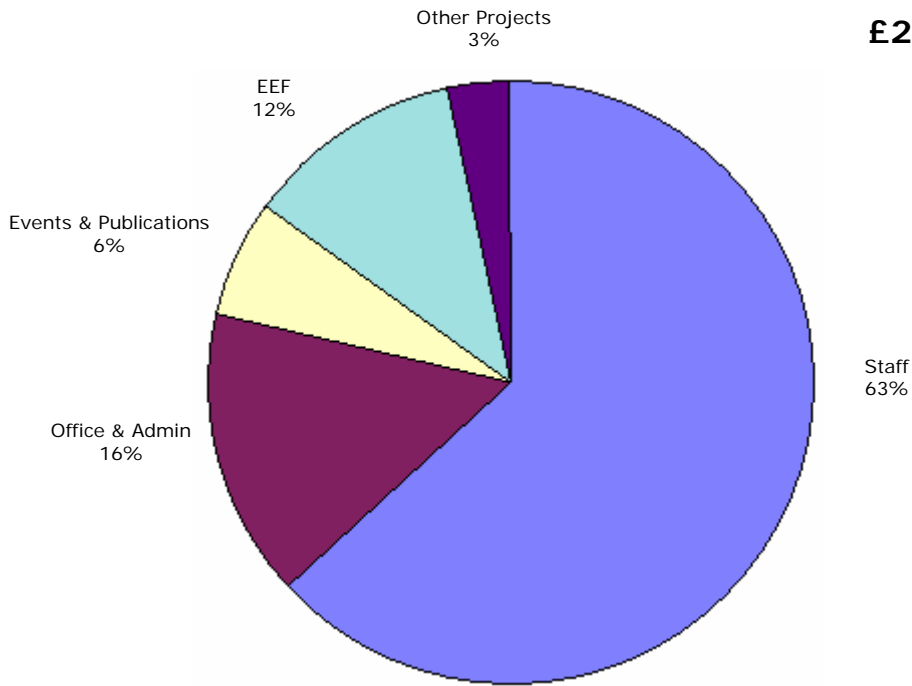
Director, Hon Treasurer

Northern Ireland Environment Link Ltd

Expenditure and Income Charts 31 March 2007

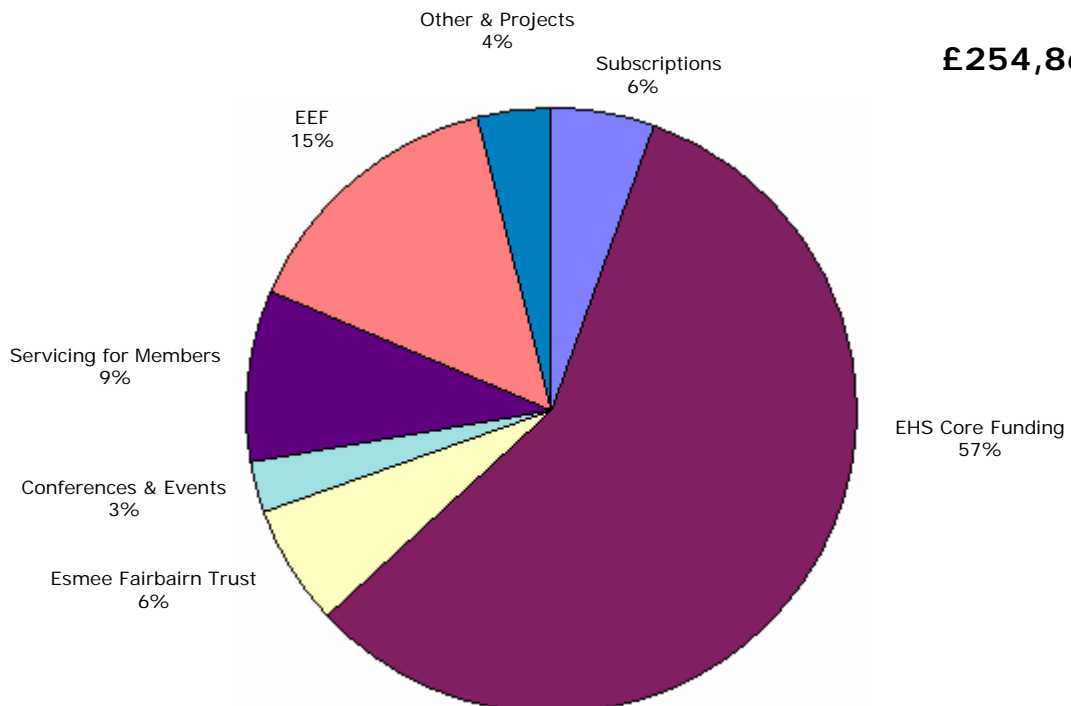
Expenditure 2006-2007

£213,694



Income 2006-2007

£254,865





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Charity No XR19598

Supported by

