



giving
nature
a home



Getting involved in planning in Northern Ireland: Climate change

While we need to work nationally and internationally to secure progress on climate change, we also need to galvanise local action. Find out how you can influence your council and help make your area more sustainable for the future.

Using this document

This document is intended to help you to influence your Local Authority and make your area more sustainable. It will help you respond to planning applications and development plans in your area to help ensure that new developments minimise their climate impacts. It should be used with our leaflets “*Getting involved with planning applications*” and “*How to get involved with development plans*”.

Climate change is already affecting wildlife. Species are moving northwards and uphill, and some are becoming mismatched with their normal food sources. The decline of UK kittiwakes by 70% has been linked to changes in food sources driven by warming seas. For more information see RSPB’s [‘The nature of climate change report’](#).

We can act to help by limiting climate change and making sure species can cope with these changes.

Climate change

The first decade of this century has been the warmest decade so far documented. These globally higher temperatures have affected physical and biological systems in many ways, including: shrinkage of glaciers, more frequent, persistent and intense El Niño events, shifting of plant and animal ranges, and declines in some plant and animal populations.

The UK Climate Change Act (2008) requires a 34% reduction in CO₂ from 1990 by 2020. Dependent on greater commitment, or EU emissions reductions, it is hoped this will increase to a 42% reduction.

Ultimately, though, the UK government are working towards an 80% reduction by 2050, which is required if we are to have a reasonable chance of avoiding dangerous climate change.



To help achieve these targets, action will be required at both local and national level. Find out how you can respond to planning applications and Development Plans to help ensure that new developments are created in a way that takes into consideration their climate change impacts.

Reducing the greenhouse gas emissions from new development

There are two ways of reducing the climate change impacts of built development.

One is to reduce the amount of energy such development uses, and the other is to ensure that as much of the energy as possible is produced by on-site or local renewable energy.

Planning and climate change adaptation

Providing better space for wildlife through natural features such as parks, gardens, buffer zones and wildlife corridors (green infrastructure), and creating development that leaves room for biodiversity will give species room to move and adapt to climate change.

Using planning policy to influence Development Plans and planning applications

When commenting on planning applications, or Development Plans, it is important to strengthen your response by quoting relevant parts of national planning guidance.

Regional planning policy is produced by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Planning. The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS), which supersedes the previous 20 Planning Policy Statements (PPSs), is the national policy document that sets out general guidance for planners. Local planners will refer to and follow this national guidance when producing Development Plans or deciding local planning applications.

Planning and Climate Change

In Northern Ireland, various subject policy sections within the SPPS have different parts relevant to climate change adaptation and that may therefore be useful to refer to when decisions are being made on planning applications.

As yet we do not have a specific subject policy section within the SPPS for the area of planning and climate change. We therefore recommend the following areas should be assessed and raised for consideration by the local council if there are concerns:

- The effect of development on biodiversity and its capacity to adapt to likely change in the climate.
- The contribution to be made from existing and new opportunities for open space and green infrastructure to urban cooling (areas that are not built on can help to cool cities), sustainable drainage systems, and conserving and enhancing biodiversity.

Action through Local Development Plans

All developments should make some provisions for biodiversity. By creating more space for wildlife we can increase its ability to adapt to changes in the environment.

Therefore we have to ensure that all new development provides as much room for wildlife as possible.

Encourage your local council to protect and expand the network of local protected sites. Ensure that where feasible developers also identify some new areas for habitat recreation. This may be wetland, heathland or another priority habitat, depending on the area where you live or the area of the proposal.

Planning applications

When responding to planning applications, look for the following;

- Ensure that all developments are designed to function effectively in future climatic conditions, with low energy inputs.
- Ensure the development incorporates the provision of multifunction greenspace that provides opportunities for both recreation and biodiversity.
- Ask whether green roofs have been considered (a green roof is a roof of a building that is partially or completely covered with vegetation and soil, that provides useable habitat for plants and invertebrates).
- Ask for ponds planted with native species as these help with biodiversity and can provide important drainage functions.
- Ensure that the development minimises the extent to which it cuts off any existing link between green spaces and ask for green corridors to be provided between green areas – ensure the development does not completely isolate an area important for biodiversity.
- Ask developers to provide gardens, or at the very least balconies. Even a small area like a balcony can, with the help of potted plants, provide shelter and food for birds and all kinds of other wildlife, such as butterflies and dragonflies.

Further information

A planning and climate change guide has been produced in England and Wales by a coalition of planners, local authorities, developers and environmental organisations, including the RSPB.

Planning for Climate Change Guide: guidance for local authorities is designed primarily for local authorities who want both to tackle climate change and to reap the benefits that renewable energy and effective adaptation can bring. This guide can be referred to for examples of best practice guidance in Northern Ireland and is available to download from the Town and Country Planning (TCPA) website (www.tcpa.org.uk).

