

Questions set out within the Draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland:

Q1 - Is our Vision 2050 the right vision? If not, what would you change?

Belfast Resilience Strategy sets out the goal for Belfast to “transition to an inclusive, net-zero-emissions, climate resilient economy in a generation.” To align with the language used in the Belfast Resilience Strategy and that used in the Belfast Net Zero Carbon Roadmap we would encourage the use of the phrase net-zero-emissions society rather than low emissions society. We feel this would set the appropriate level of ambition for all stakeholders across Northern Ireland society, and recommend that appropriate support is put in place to facilitate this transition.

Q2 - Are our Green Growth principles right? If not, what should be included / taken out and why?

Yes, we feel that the Green Growth principles are appropriate for a high-level strategy such as the Draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland. Furthermore, a commitment to a local placemaking approach would enhance the role of local authorities in coordinating local action to address the climate crisis, with appropriate resources put in place to facilitate this process.

Section 2

Q3 - Are we right to adopt a Green Growth approach bringing together green jobs, climate action and the environment?

Yes, we believe this is the correct approach. We refer you to the recommendations of the Reset for Growth report produced by the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission which is summarised in the following report and attached for your information:
<https://minutes3.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/s93148/Belfast%20Innovation%20and%20Inclusive%20Growth%20Commission%20Reset%20for%20Growth%20Report%20-%20Council%20Response.pdf>

More is needed in terms of growing specific clusters and industries like the hydrogen industry. There needs to be a clear strategy for this.

Q4 - Is a statutory Green Growth test needed to ensure we put climate action, environment and green jobs at the heart of policy development?

Yes, however the test and the process of application should be clearly defined to ensure that it is used effectively. We further recommend that it is applied across all programmes of government and to all funding programmes. We welcome the linking of public funding to climate responsibilities as this will focus minds and ensure deliverables and outcomes are clearly linked to addressing the climate crisis. Potentially the test should prevent actions that have a negative impact on Green Growth as well as supporting those with a positive impact.

Q5 - Should Green Growth be one of our top Executive investment and budgetary priorities?

Yes, it should be a top priority given the cross cutting and urgent nature of the issues being addressed. The Committee for Climate Change and the Draft Green Growth Strategy recognise the need for action throughout the 2020s to ensure that “by the 2030s choices in all areas must be the low-carbon option.”

This needs to include access to various forms of funding including the Green Investment Board and joint investment frameworks with the private sector.

Section 3

Q6 - Do we need specific targets for each sector set out in Climate Action Plans? If yes, how would this be brought about; and if no, how should we ensure we drive change?

Yes, specific targets should be set out in the forthcoming Climate Action Plans, linked to relevant strategies such as the forthcoming Energy Strategy and the forthcoming Environment Strategy. These should be developed through an evidence-based approach, in collaboration with key stakeholders in each sector. Reports such as the Belfast Net Zero Carbon Roadmap set out a potential pathway to achieving net zero across a range of sectors including housing and transport https://pcancities.org.uk/sites/default/files/Belfast%20Net-Zero%20Carbon%20Roadmap_0.pdf

We propose that a robust results framework is established with indicators, milestones and targets that cascade from regional through to sectoral and local levels. We also recommend that a costed implementation plan is developed (incorporating an economic appraisal of delivery options) along with a resource mobilisation plan to ensure that the strategy can be delivered within the timeframe. This will require innovative financial models that can crowd in private sector finance. We are working closely with colleagues at PCAN, the UK Climate Investment Commission and LSE on potential financial models and are happy to share this experience.

A public facing report should be produced annually – commitment must be given now to quicker wins such as housing retrofit, transport, decarbonisation and energy transition.

Q7 - Do you agree on the definition of the sectors?

Yes, we agree with the alignment of sectors to those defined by the Committee for Climate Change (CCC) to allow measurement of progress to be undertaken by the CCC as well as through local mechanisms.

Section 4

Q8 - Do you agree with the adoption of a Just Transition approach? If not, what approach should we be taking and why?

Yes, the Just Transition approach is at the heart of the work of Belfast Climate Commission, a partnership between Belfast City Council and Queens University of Belfast. It is vital that those most vulnerable in society, and those potentially most impacted by the anticipated changes are protected from negative impacts, that all members of society have a voice in the process, and that an affordable and fair transition is made available for all across society.

Q9 - How do we ensure this Just Transition - is a Commission the right way forward?

We believe that a Just Transition Framework is the right way forward, with appropriate governance to ensure integration across policies and action, at the regional and local level. The VCSE sector is often the voice of the vulnerable and underrepresented in our society and should be given a role in advocating for and ensuring that the most vulnerable are protected throughout the transition. The VCSE panel within Belfast Community Planning Partnership is an example of how that voice can be incorporated into a strategic programme of planning and delivery.

Q10 - How do we make sure the public and all stakeholders (including young people) are actively engaged with Green Growth? Is a Citizen Assembly Panel the right structure?

We recommend a review of existing engagement mechanisms in Northern Ireland to identify strengths and weaknesses, supporting existing good practice where possible and addressing gaps in representation where they exist. A wide-ranging engagement framework would ensure that there is the greatest chance of hearing as many voices as possible, including people of all ages. Oversight and coordination should be incorporated into the framework, and the framework should be appropriately resourced.

Section 5

Q11 - How can we work most effectively with businesses, local government and organisations across Northern Ireland to maximise and deliver our decarbonisation and Green Growth efforts?

Through the Green Growth governance arrangements, forthcoming climate action plan mechanisms, the co-design and co-delivery of programmes at both regional and local authority levels, to ensure a joined-up approach across sectors. Thematic advisory panels may be required as sectoral targets and plans are developed, and to address underpinning issues such as climate finance, innovation and technology.

We have drawn on the recent positive engagement through the LGA with UK government departments to highlight below the importance of a place based approach and the role of local government in encouraging a strong public and private sector partnering approach.

Regional and local government collaboration will be essential to delivering the strategy. Supporting green growth requires significant national, regional and sector leadership, but only local government can mobilise and join-up the collective action of all partners, businesses, and people in places. Local government therefore has a unique and powerful place leadership and delivery role on cross-cutting issues like climate change, which was exemplified during the pandemic.

More than half of the emissions reductions that are needed rely on people and businesses taking up low-carbon solutions. These are decisions that are made at a local and individual level, and many of these decisions depend on having supporting infrastructure and systems in place.

Places are very different, which can mean a quite fundamentally different journey to Net Zero. The journey facing a town or city economy will be different from a rural area dominated by the agriculture sector. Variations include population density, shape of the economy, infrastructure, geographical features, etc.

Local government holds a wide range of important powers and assets for decarbonising and adapting to climate change in places and achieving a just transition to Net Zero, and it is ambitious to fulfil this potential as an essential delivery partner.

However, there is a need to grow the capacity and skills in local government rapidly. This includes on exchanging experience of what works in different places, how the impacts of different initiatives can be understood, success replicated, and the need to upskill within local government.

Crucially though, the overall strategy towards green growth should outline the support for local government to fulfil its role, and provide clarity on the expectations of local government and so the certainty on where they will need to invest in developing capacity.

Day to day local government engages with a multiplicity of regional agencies and schemes, on a range of different programmes with overlapping objectives. There is lots of positive work underway, but a fragmented policy and funding environment creates complexity, uncertainty and missed opportunity; and often without the scale to deliver the level of change necessary.

Within this complexity there is not the overall long-term regional strategy around what local authorities are working towards and clarity of what is expected of them. This can limit the huge potential of local government to play its leadership role in place, and to build its own capacity and local path to support green growth and deliver against Net Zero commitments.

BCC would like to work towards building a partnership which ensures the right balance of powers, responsibilities, and where resources rest at the right level to best achieve different outcomes. We propose:

- including a chapter in the Strategy on the role of local government in place which sets out how regional government and local government will work together to deliver the strategy in places;
- creating a leadership group of government departments and local government to take forward this chapter of the Strategy, developing, leading and overseeing the delivery of a single framework / programme for local government;
- agreeing some underlying principles moving forward, including clarity of ambitions and time frames; expectations of local government; what/how to prioritise actions; powers and accountabilities to move to the right level for delivery; resourcing for duration; local flexibilities; support for local capacity building/learning.

Next steps to develop a collaborative programme of actions could include:

- preparing a statement of intent marking the beginning of renewed collaboration across all levels of government;
- developing a cross-departmental and local government green growth leadership group to take forward the Strategy; (similar to a City/Growth Deal structure) and
- establishing sub-groups to work on priority and complex issues (such as decarbonising and adapting homes and places, decarbonising and adapting transport, supporting green jobs and skills, building consensus for change etc.), developing evidence and information sharing, mapping how everything works in places.

Q12 - How should the public sector be leading by example on Green Growth?

Belfast City Council has undertaken a range of measures including the declaration of a climate emergency in October 2019, establishing a Resilience and Sustainability Board within the Belfast Community Planning Partnership, establishing the Belfast Climate Commission in partnership with Queens University of Belfast, appointing the first Commissioner for Resilience in Northern Ireland, and subsequently appointing the Belfast Climate Commissioner, with the aim of driving forward a programme to address the climate crisis.

The Council has developed a draft Adaptation Plan and is in the process of developing a Council Decarbonisation Plan, with a small budget established to enable this work programme. Council part funded the Belfast Net Zero Carbon Roadmap and commissioned the Belfast Climate Risk Assessment. In addition, Belfast City Council has signed up to the Carbon Disclosure Project, and to a number of global frameworks such as the Race to Zero, Race to Resilience, WWF One Planet City Challenge, the Core Cities UK COP26 Declaration, and the Glasgow Food and Climate Pledge.

Through the Place Based Climate Action Network (PCAN) and Core Cities Climate Investment Commission, Belfast City Council has been at the forefront of efforts to establish climate finance mechanisms as well as using Council resources to integrate green and blue infrastructure, lead on initiatives such as the Belfast One Million Trees Programme, and the Greenways Programme across the city. In addition, Belfast City Council will seek to ensure skills and job opportunities are available for all citizens, working closely with education providers and employers in the city. This Council is ambitious to do more, but will need to work with central government to ensure the right focus, programmes and resources to deliver.

Section 6

Q13 - What indicators should we use to measure the success (or otherwise) of our Green Growth strategy?

As noted above, we propose that a robust results framework is established with indicators, milestones and targets that cascade from regional through to sectoral and local levels. We recommend that a suite of indicators be developed that can measure progress against sectoral targets, assess the success of the Just Transition approach, and levels of engagement in the Green Growth process. These should be drawn from best practice with advice provided from relevant experts.

Given that this is a cross-cutting strategy, indicators should be aligned with related strategies and programmes of work in order to avoid duplication of effort. For example, indicators around Circular

Economy should be aligned with those being developed for the NI Circular Economy strategic framework. Consider economic, environmental and social indicators.

Examples (not an exhaustive list) could include:

- Number of Circular Economy Industries.
- Number of jobs that have been reviewed and "greened"
- Number of green social enterprises, e.g. sharing economy
- Carbon footprint of products
- Co2 production
- Biogas production
- Energy usage, including renewable
- Water consumption
- Material consumption
- Waste prevented and waste reduction measures
- Waste/material reused
- Waste recycled
- Locally produced products containing recycled material (and % content)
- Total waste produced and amount sent to landfill/EFW etc.
- Measuring sustainability of all new developments and industries

Q14 - How can there be effective oversight of Green Growth - should there be a dedicated Assembly Committee, or independent scrutiny?

A dedicated Assembly Committee would be essential to ensure cross party support and that there is an oversight mechanism at the heart of government. Potentially both a Committee and independent scrutiny mechanism. Each Permanent Secretary should be given specific targets.

Section 7

Q15 - Please add any other comments or suggestions you think are relevant to developing and delivering our Green Growth strategy.

We welcome the recognition of Belfast's work programmes in the Draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland and strongly recommend that local government becomes a coordinating and delivery mechanism for local programmes to drive the Green Growth Strategy as it delivers on the ground. Local government must be resourced appropriately to enable effective delivery and to support ongoing programmes of research, engagement and innovation. In relation to 'green jobs' there should be a focus on greening existing sectors of employment as well as support for new jobs that enable a green economy in Northern Ireland.