

# **Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report**

## **Determination of the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Draft Green Growth Strategy**



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working,  
active landscape valued by everyone

October 2021

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## 1. Executive Summary

The objective of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development.

The purpose of this document is to undertake a screening assessment that meets the requirements of the European Legislation, applied in NI through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004.

Under the legislation, Responsible Authorities must carry out screening to determine whether plans or programmes are likely to have significant environmental effects.

The criteria for determining whether a particular plan or programme is likely to have significant environmental effects are outlined in Annex II of the SEA Directive. These criteria are reproduced in Schedule 1 of the 2004 Regulations. The *Draft Green Growth Strategy* was screened against the criteria to determine if significant environmental effects are likely and if a SEA is required.

The conclusion reached following the screening check and the review against the environmental criteria set out in Regulation 9(2) Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (NI) 2004, is that a full SEA is **not** required at this stage.

At this stage, the Draft Green Growth Strategy provides a high-level strategic vision to reach Net-Zero by 2050, and while some principles have been identified, the mechanisms of delivery have not.

However, it is recognised that forthcoming policies, strategies, programmes, plans and measures that will be developed in order to deliver the Green Growth Strategy will be subject to screening for a SEA. Depending on the outcome of the screening process, these policies, strategies, programmes, plans and measures will continue to a full SEA, Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as appropriate. Any environmental effects identified will be considered in this process.

## 2. Background

In February 2020 the Northern Ireland Assembly declared a climate emergency – we are facing climate breakdown and biodiversity crisis. Climate change is happening and extreme weather events are increasingly having a devastating impact on people’s lives. The continued decline in our natural ecosystems and species puts at risk our health and prosperity and nature’s ability to deal with climate change.

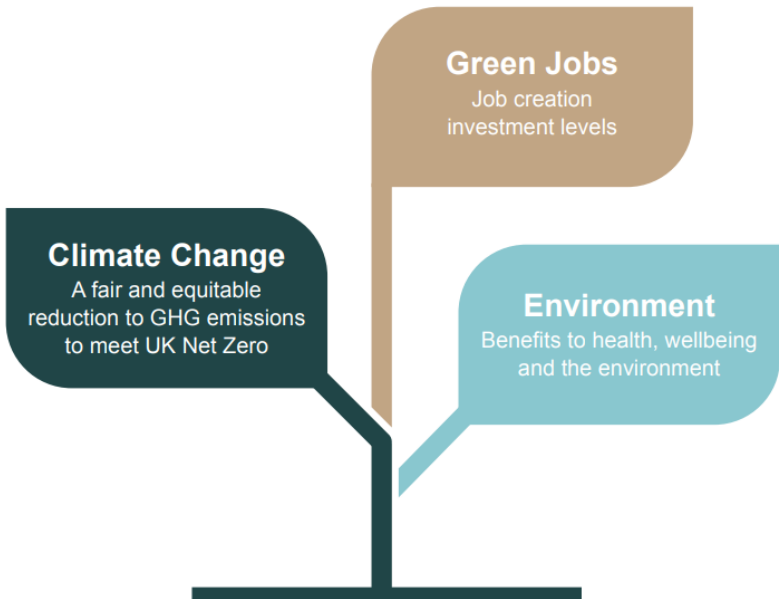
This decade, the 2020s, must be a decade of urgent action. Collectively we must lay the foundations for a more sustainable society before irreparable damage is done. There is still time to make a difference, but we must act now and we must do it together with a shared vision of the future and a plan to make it a reality.

Climate and nature are cross-cutting areas that are fundamentally interconnected. They are impacted by many policies and programmes of work that without a truly collaborative approach run the risk of delivering only unintended consequences and confusion. DAERA officials have therefore carried out engagements targeting key internal and external stakeholders from the business, local government and voluntary and community sectors as well as with children and young people. As a result, many different voices have been involved in informing this Draft Green Growth Strategy on behalf on the NI Executive.

The Green Growth Strategy is seeking to adopt a holistic approach to tackling the climate crisis in the right way by balancing climate action with the environment and the economy in a way that benefits all our people. It is about making sure we take advantage of these three elements in a thoughtful way, creating more green jobs and protecting and repurposing existing jobs where possible.

The objectives of Green Growth are to:

- Transform Northern Ireland society towards net zero carbon by 2050;
- Improve and protect the quality of our land, seas, air, water and biodiversity; and
- Grow a strong and sustainable economy through greater productivity, innovation and capacity.



The high level Green Growth principles underpinning this strategy, developed from engagement with stakeholders, are to:

- **Respect our planet** - by restoring and protecting our natural capital. Future human wellbeing depends on a healthy and resilient natural world.
- **Decarbonise** - replace fossil fuels with renewable energy.
- **Reduce our wasteful use of resources** - through greater efficiency and an increasingly diverse and circular economy.
- **Re-evaluate, recognise and reward what matters** - create genuine, shared wellbeing by prioritising human development that we and the planet can live with.
- **Lead by example** - inspire ambition, innovation and courage for change. Show the way by being honest, open and transparent in measuring our progress.
- **Collaborate** - work and learn together to develop solutions that maximise the outcomes we want to see.
- **Use all tools available** - balancing and utilising tools such as investing in research and development, de-risking new technology, regulation, legislation, incentives, information and budgets.
- **Share responsibility** - we all must act and ensure that there is a just transition to a low carbon, nature rich society.
- **Measure progress** - openness and transparency about progress, regularly evolving our actions through continuous learning and improvement based on data and science.

Area covered:

Northern Ireland.

Period covered:

30 years (2021-2050).

Frequency of updates/revisions:

The Draft Green Growth Strategy will be subject to periodic review at a frequency which is yet to be determined. The strategy will be reviewed to take into account progress made and technological advancements.

### 3. Screening information

Key screening information about the plan is as follows:

#### **What prompted the programme (e.g. regulatory or administrative requirements, or preparing it voluntarily)?**

In February 2020 the Northern Ireland Assembly declared a climate emergency. Across the world there is recognition that continuing to meet consumption by traditional methods is having a damaging impact on our environment. The necessity to change is evident and Northern Ireland must play its part.

DAERA Minister Poots launched Green Growth at the Assembly in June 2020, outlining his concept for a Green Growth approach for Northern Ireland, as part of our recovery from Covid-19. By working together, with a “build back better” focus, Northern Ireland can plan for and develop opportunities for economic renewal which recognise the importance of our environment and in doing so, advocate a pathway to a sustainable future. By becoming a priority area for the Northern Ireland Executive, Green Growth will facilitate economic growth and development, while ensuring natural assets continue to provide the resources and environment on which our wellbeing depends.

DAERA, on behalf of the Executive, are leading the development of a multi-decade Draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland. Minister Poots directed that a collaborative approach is used, so the Strategy has been taken forward with engagement from other Departments, Local Government and stakeholders from across the business and voluntary sectors.

The Draft Green Growth Strategy is the Executive’s route map to address climate and environmental challenges while encouraging sustainable economic growth in Northern Ireland. It will align existing and developing new strategies and policies across Government, to achieve carbon reduction, environmental improvement and more sustainable economic growth.

The Strategy will help realise Outcome 2 “*We live and work sustainably – protecting and improving the environment*” in the Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework Consultation Document as well as supporting delivery across at least four other outcomes. It also addresses the NDNA commitment “*The Executive will tackle climate change head on with a strategy to address the immediate and longer term impacts of climate change*” and the achievement of net zero carbon in the UK by 2050 as outlined in The Climate Change Act, as amended in 2019.

DAERA is co-ordinating the work however all Departments will be bringing forward policy interventions for areas within their Department’s remit.

A Green Growth Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG) was established and all members confirmed their commitment to the ambition and desired outcomes of the Green Growth agenda to deliver together for the people of Northern Ireland in protecting and enhancing our environment whilst delivering sustainable economic growth. This is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of every person in Northern Ireland.

#### **What is the subject of the programme?**

Green Growth will be the Executive’s overarching strategy to focus and align our actions and interventions to address the climate challenge, enhance and protect the environment and green the economy, enabling Northern Ireland’s contribution towards meeting the UK net zero

target by 2050, to be achieved. Green Growth, whilst lead by DAERA, applies across all NICS Departments.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The conclusion reached following the screening check and the review against the environmental significance criteria as set out in Schedule 1 of The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 Regulations is that **a full SEA is not required** for the following reasons:

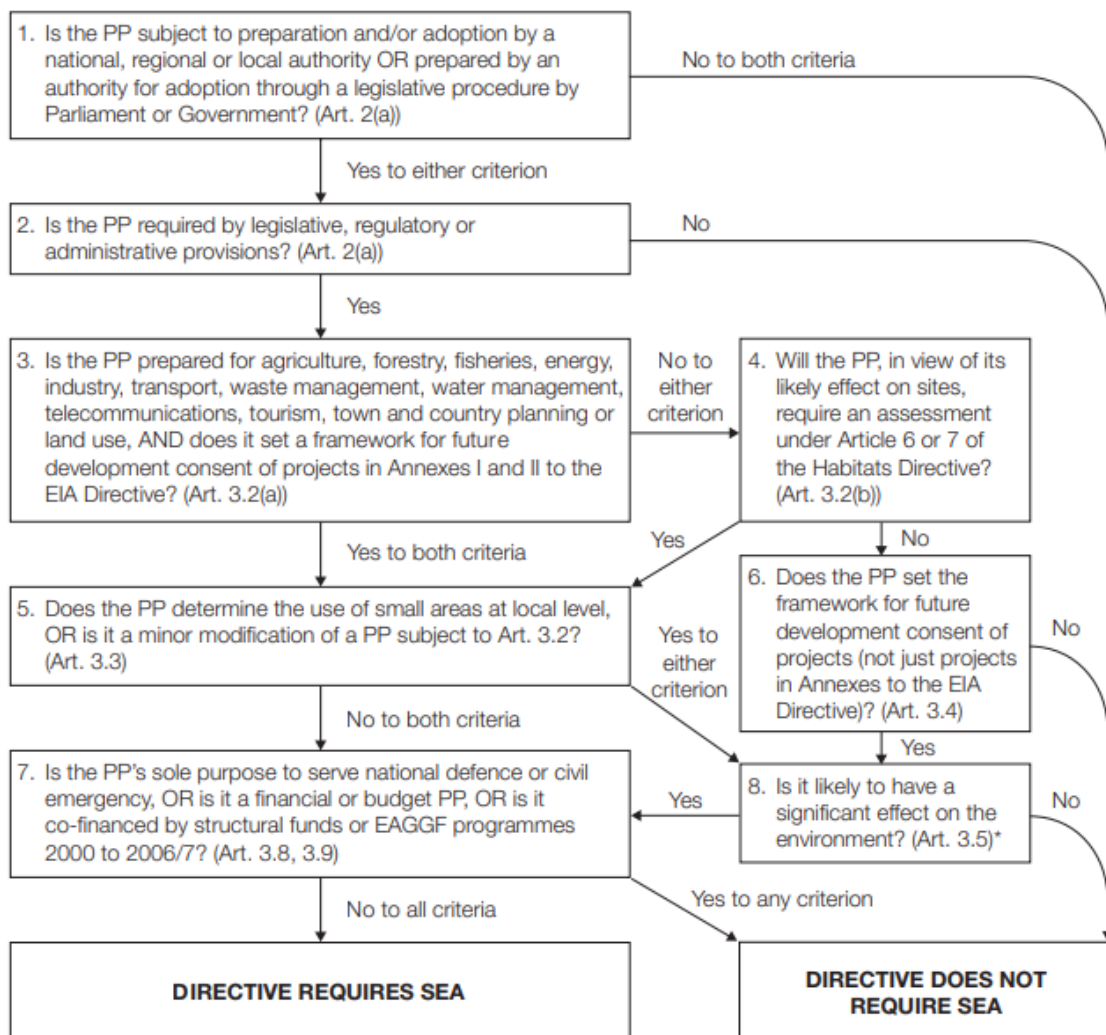
1. The Green Growth Strategy does not provide a framework for development consent of projects listed in the SEA Directive.
2. The purpose of the document is to set a strategic direction of travel on the pathway to Net Zero by 2050. It is a high level plan rather than a delivery programme.
3. Procedures, criteria and details for the implementation of the strategic vision will be set in strategies, policies, programmes and plans developed by NICS. Each of these policies and programmes will, where appropriate, be subject to screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and/or screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA).
4. Depending on the outcome of the screening process these policies, plans and measures will continue to full SEA and AA, as appropriate. Any environmental effects identified will be considered within this process.

## Appendix 1

DAERA guidance can be found at [A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](http://daera-ni.gov.uk) provides a checklist based on the SEA Regulations to help determine whether SEA is required. This guide has been used as the basis on which to assess the need for SEA as set out in Diagram 1.

**Diagram 1 SEA Regulations guide flow diagram**

This diagram is intended as a guide to the criteria for application of the Directive to plans and programmes (PPs). It has no legal status.



\*The Directive requires Member States to determine whether plans or programmes in this category are likely to have significant environmental effects. These determinations may be made on a case by case basis and/or by specifying types of plan or programme.

## Appendix 2

**Table 1. Screening checklist, illustrating the process that has been followed.**

	Establishing the needs for SEA	Yes/ No	DAERA Response	Next Step
1	Is the PP subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?	Yes	The Draft Green Growth Strategy is not a statutory plan or programme. Its preparation is not a legislative requirement. The strategy is being prepared and will be adopted by NICS Departments to transform our society towards net zero by 2050.	Proceed to Question 2
2	Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions?	Yes	The Draft Green Growth Strategy addresses the NDNA commitment " <i>The Executive will tackle climate change head on with a strategy to address the immediate and longer term impacts of climate change</i> ".  The strategy will also assist Northern Ireland meet its commitments to the legislative provision for the UK to reach net zero by 2050.	Proceed to Question 3
3	Is the PP prepared for agricultural, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and county planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Regulations?	No	The strategy impacts current and future energy and land use, agriculture, forestry etc. The strategy is directional and sets a framework for future development consents for a number of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive.	Proceed to Question 4
4	Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive?	No	The Draft Green Growth Strategy does not identify any sites for development.	Proceed to question 6
6	Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)?	No	The Draft Green Growth Strategy will set the strategic direction for these sectors. It will not provide a framework for development consent of projects as listed in the EU Directive, but will influence sectoral policies,	<b>No SEA required</b>

## Appendix 3

**Table 2. Screening for significant environmental impacts against the criteria set out in Annex II of the Directive.**

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment	DAERA Response
<b>Characteristics of the plan</b>	
(a) the degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	<p>DAERA is responsible for Outcome 2, of the current Programme for Government - “we live and work sustainably – protecting the environment”. There are six indicators which are used to quantify achievement towards Outcome 2. The indicators falling under DAERA’s remit include greenhouse gas emissions, household waste recycling, air quality, water quality and biodiversity.</p> <p>Indicator 29 is Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The target set by CCC for NI (82% GHG reduction by 2050) requires a significant change in approach by NICS and this is being addressed by Green Growth.</p> <p>While this strategy sets the direction of travel and strategic vision to 2050, business areas will subsequently be taking forward work to develop detailed policies, programmes and plans across policy areas, which will be accompanied by statutory assessments and subject to consultation and engagement in their own right.</p>
(b) the degree to which the plan influences other plans including those in a hierarchy	<p>Green Growth is a directional strategy which applies to all NICS Departments, it is therefore likely to significantly influence a wide range of other plans / programmes at all levels. The strategy occupies a high level in the plan hierarchy, in that it is an Executive strategy and positioned below the PfG.</p> <p>The Draft Green Growth Strategy set the strategic direction of travel for future strategies, plan and programmes. It will ensure that all related plans and policies that derive from the strategic vision will deliver towards climate action, enhancement of the environment and a green sustainable economy.</p> <p>Individual future policies, plans and programmes for specific sectoral areas developed in line with the strategic direction set out in the Green Growth Strategy will be subject to SEA and where necessary, Appropriate Assessment processes.</p>

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment	DAERA Response
(c) the relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	<p>The Draft Green Growth Strategy sets the strategic direction of travel for future strategies, plan and programmes. It will ensure that all related plans and policies that derive from the strategic vision will deliver towards climate action, enhancement of the environment and a green sustainable economy.</p> <p>Individual future policies, plans and programmes for specific sectoral areas developed in line with the strategic direction set out in the Draft Green Growth Strategy will be subject to SEA and where necessary, Appropriate Assessment processes.</p>
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan	<p>The Draft Green Growth Strategy sets the strategic direction of travel for future strategies, plan and programmes. It will ensure that all related plans and policies that derive from the strategic vision will deliver towards climate action, enhancement of the environment and a green sustainable economy.</p> <p>Individual future policies, plans and programmes for specific sectoral areas developed in line with the strategic direction set out in the Green Growth Strategy will be subject to SEA and where appropriate, Appropriate Assessment processes.</p>
(e) the relevance of the plan for the implementation of European Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans linked to waste management or water protection)	<p>The Draft Green Growth Strategy will help deliver NI's share of carbon reductions in line with UK Net Zero commitments by 2050.</p> <p>Individual future policies, plans and programmes for specific sectoral areas developed in line with the strategic direction set out in the Green Growth Strategy will be subject to SEA and where necessary, Appropriate Assessment processes.</p>
<b>Characteristics of the plan's effects and of the area likely to be affected</b>	
(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the plan's effects	<p>The Executive's Draft Green Growth Strategy is multi-decade covering a 30 year period. Green Growth is expected to generate a range of <b>positive</b> social, environmental and economic changes. The Green Growth approach is expected to be embedded into existing and developing departmental functions.</p> <p>However it will be the responsibility of business areas to develop policies and programmes to deliver on Green Growth within their remits and for the business areas to ensure that necessary approval processes are adhered to.</p> <p>All potential effects identified as part of these processes will be considered in relation to the characteristics of the effects and the area likely to</p>

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment	DAERA Response
	be affected. These processes will have regard to the criteria listed in the relevant legislation.
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects	High probability of <b>positive</b> cumulative effects on our society, economy and our <b>environment</b> due to the cross cutting nature of the actions and opportunities which will be progressed through agreement of the Inter-ministerial Working Group.
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects (i.e. environmental effects on other EU Member States)	Northern Ireland is vulnerability to climate change impacts and strategic approaches such as Green Growth reflect this. There may also be benefits in looking at Climate change and net zero carbon at an All-Ireland and British Isles scale but the current legal duty rests solely with NICS government Departments and not the wider public body remit. <b>Environmental effects</b> on other EU Member States are <b>expected to be positive</b> .
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	Short and long term positive human health and environment impacts are very likely. Green Growth will play an important strategic, rather than direct role, in addressing risks to human health or the natural environment. Risks will be minimised by proactive engagement with relevant departments and experts such as the Department of Health.
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	This strategy covers all of Northern Ireland, an area of approximately 14,130km <sup>2</sup> with a population of 1.894 Million. Green Growth is expected to generate <b>positive NI wide environmental effects</b> . The magnitude of the impact will be determined by the effectiveness of each policy or programme developed by the business areas.
(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or intensive land-use.	Any effects that may result from Green Growth on qualifying interests of some European sites and other natural and cultural designations would be <b>expected to be positive</b> and their impact would be managed in liaison with the relevant authority. Some elements within the individual programmes, rather than overarching Draft Green Growth Strategy, may propose actions to address risks / opportunities that relate to valuable or vulnerable environments, however these will be accompanied by statutory assessments and subject to consultation and engagement in their own right. The Draft Green Growth Strategy is likely to have a <b>positive environmental impact</b> .

<b>Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment</b>	<b>DAERA Response</b>
(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status	<p>Some measures within individual programmes, rather than the Draft Green Growth Strategy itself, may have potential to address risks / opportunities that relate to recognised landscapes.</p> <p>These measures may affect areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or International protection status, such as SPAs or SACs, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Where relevant Habitat Regulation Assessment will be prepared to assess the impact on European sites.</p>