



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Environment Strategy and Green Growth:
Department of Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs

12 November 2020

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Declan McAleer (Chairperson)
Mr Philip McGuigan (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Clare Bailey
Mrs Rosemary Barton
Mr John Blair
Mr Maurice Bradley
Mr Harry Harvey
Mr William Irwin
Mr Patsy McGlone

Witnesses:

Mr David Small	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Ms Tracey Teague	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Mr Simon Webb	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Mr Arron Wright	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): At this juncture, I welcome, via StarLeaf, David Small, deputy secretary; Simon Webb, the head of neighbourhood environmental quality branch; Tracey Teague, director of resource efficiency division; and Arron Wright, acting director of green growth. I invite you to commence the briefing, and that will be followed by questions from members. You are very welcome this morning.

Mr David Small (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): Chairman, can you hear me OK? This is David Small.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Yes, we can hear you loud and clear. Patsy, Clare and Maurice, can you hear OK?

The Committee Clerk: They are muted.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Yes, they are muted. That is dead on, David. We can hear you fine.

Mr Small: Thank you very much. First of all, I appreciate the opportunity to meet the Committee to discuss the environment strategy for Northern Ireland. The focus of our briefing this morning is to

discuss the findings of the public discussion exercise on the proposed strategy as opposed to the detailed content of the strategy, which still has to be developed.

To set this in context, I will give the Committee a bit of background on the strategy and how we have got to where we are now. Northern Ireland faces many challenges, such as climate change, waste management, the development of a circular economy, waste crime, air quality, local environment quality, biodiversity loss and soil quality, and there are specific issues associated with agricultural activity, agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, the effect of nitrogen and phosphorous run-off on water quality and the impact of ammonia emissions on our air quality, designated sites and priority species. It is a very busy area. *[Inaudible]* along with the additional environmental opportunities arising from our withdrawal from the EU and the publication of the UK Government's 25-year plan for the environment create a strong impetus for the first long-term environment strategy for Northern Ireland, which will form part of the green growth framework that you will hear more about shortly from Tracey and Arron. The UK Bill contains provisions that, if enacted by the Assembly, will require the Department to prepare an environmental improvement plan and to accompany that with reports to assess progress. If the environment strategy is adopted as Northern Ireland's first environmental improvement plan under the Environment Bill, that will give the strategy a legal underpinning. Whilst no decisions have been made on this yet, the Minister will engage with Executive colleagues on the possibility at an appropriate point.

The Department launched a public discussion document on a future environment strategy in September 2019 in order to seek the widest possible range of views. That was based on a series of high-level questions that provided the public and stakeholders with an opportunity to shape the strategy in advance of drafting work commencing. The public discussion closed on 5 February 2020, with 2,500 responses received from across Northern Ireland reflecting the views of a wide range of respondents, including young people, and we made particular efforts to reach young people because we thought that that was important.

Working with Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) colleagues, a summary report was produced, and that, I think, has been copied to the Committee. The Minister has now given his agreement to begin drafting the strategy, using the key findings of the report to help to inform content. The environment strategy team will seek input to the strategy from business units across DAERA, other Departments and key stakeholders on a wide range of issues in the coming months.

As with subjects like energy, economy and transport, the environment strategy is one of the main strategies underpinning the Executive's overarching green growth strategy and delivery framework, and while other sister strategies will contribute more to the green growth gain regarding net zero carbon and sustainable economic growth, the environment strategy will provide the focus for protecting and enhancing the wider environment.

That is all I intend to say by way of background, but Simon Webb and I will be happy to take questions from members.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you for that. David, you said that there was a public consultation from September until February. That is a huge number of responses, and those are very welcome. Is there another consultation planned for March 2021?

Mr Small: There are lots of consultations planned, Chair. For example, we are about to start one on air quality. There will be consultation here on a range of UK-wide initiatives on a deposit return scheme (DRS), for example, to try to address plastics. When we have advanced the work on the strategy a bit further, there will be a further consultation on a draft strategy itself, which will, at that point, include detailed proposals, strategic goals and strategic aims and will set out the ambition of the strategy. There will be further consultation at that point, and that is likely to be towards the end of this business year, which will probably take us into March or April.

Mrs Barton: Thank you for your introduction. It is a very wide-ranging strategy. I assume that DAERA will narrow it down into priorities and individual work plans with estimated timescales. When do you envisage us seeing something like that?

Mr Small: That work has already started. In the discussion process, it was important that we set out all the issues and challenges facing the environment in Northern Ireland. Some 91% of respondents agreed that the new strategy, for example, should be an Executive-endorsed strategy. They want the strategy to be a top priority for Northern Ireland and a central pillar that is at the heart of other

government strategies. The dominant themes to come out of that process included issues like climate change, which will be no surprise, recycling, air quality, water quality, biodiversity and plastics. Those are all very topical issues. The key dominant theme was the need to protect the natural environment, but climate change was a very strong theme.

We will now start the process of reviewing those comments in detail, reviewing the evidence *[Inaudible]* and we will begin to set out, in a more structured and focused way, our ambitions across the issues. That work is starting. As I said, we will work on that to bring us to the point where we can present a draft strategy that sets out a range of proposals.

Mrs Barton: Will the Minister have the final say on how you proceed?

Mr Small: Yes. We will work very closely with the Minister. It will be a strategy that is developed by DAERA. As I said, 91% of respondents agreed that the strategy should be an Executive-endorsed strategy, and the Executive will want to endorse it, but we will be leading all that work and will be doing so *[Inaudible.]*

Ms Bailey: I agree with Rosemary that it is a very wide-ranging strategy, but it is also non-specific. It focuses heavily on carbon, but, as you outlined, David, there is a raft of measures that need to be acted on. You mentioned the agri-sector, climate change, air quality and water quality. I am also looking at the public participation in this, and I see that people made their views clear in the responses. What other options will be explored for public participation?

Mr Small: As you know, we are working through the Environment Bill on governance. Strong governance arrangements came out again as a very strong theme from the public discussion, as did the importance of education and behaviour awareness. We recognise that governance is important. Subject to the Executive's approval, we will join the Office for Environmental Protection in its role on challenging Departments and public authorities on meeting their environmental obligations. We will provide comment and thoughts on that in the strategy document.

As I said, that process is starting only now. The discussion process was wide-ranging because we wanted to get as wide and broad a range of comments as possible from the people we were going out to. As I also said, we got 2,500 responses — it was successful in that regard — but we now need to focus on what the key issues are and what the key themes and strategic goals in the strategy will be. We will engage with colleagues in the Department and with other Departments and wider stakeholders as we take that process forward. With all that information, we will then begin to draft the detail of a strategy document that we will then consult on again. There will be opportunities for *[Inaudible]* in terms of governance and how environmental governance is managed. We will take account of the evidence and information that we have at the minute and put our proposals together in the draft strategy document.

Ms Bailey: OK. Thanks. I asked that because, in the responses, there was a great deal of interest in public forums such as a citizens' assembly. I am also looking at how the Going for Growth strategy — it was the previous strategy, and it has run out — was managed and at the level of stakeholder engagement that was in it. That was heavily focused on sectoral and business interests rather than on wider public participation.

This consultation was very wide, with 2,500 respondents. We are talking about public participation and setting up all these different bodies in the strategy. Its time frame is undetermined, yet we know that these are very urgent issues. It is about marrying the speed of delivery with meeting our legal obligations, which we have not been doing in a lot of areas. For example, you mentioned that an air quality strategy consultation is coming out, but when did our last one run out? How long have we been without a strategy? I have a lot of concerns about who will be engaging, the timeline for delivery and how we move forward on this one.

I am very carbon-focused. We have a biodiversity emergency, species extinction and all that kind of damage. That is not included here, or it is non-specific, I should say.

Mr Small: Clare, the discussion process was not meant to be specific. We deliberately did not set out what we thought we should be doing. We were seeking views on the widest range of environmental challenges that we face. We got very strong comments and themes coming through on climate change, as I said, and the need for strong governance. Agriculture features strongly as a key theme for the strategy as regards concerns being expressed about the impact of agriculture on, as you said,

things like water quality and biodiversity. The strategy will set out our goals and ambition on how we address those issues. You rightly flagged up public participation, and I agree that that is important.

Clare, may I bring Simon in on the timetable for when we hope to have a draft strategy that we put out for public consultation and to make any further comment on public participation and how citizens get involved?

Mr Simon Webb (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): Thanks, David. The expectation is that we will publish a draft strategy for an eight-week public consultation before the end of March. That would then take us up to around the end of May, which would allow finalisation of the draft strategy by the autumn. Those are the sorts of timescales that we are working to.

One of the things that we identified in the strategy is environmental engagement. That will now broaden out to environmental engagement and education in light of the comments that we received through the discussion document. We have already had very extensive collaboration. We had a large stakeholder event last year with around 90 delegates. We had a number of youth events. As you say, we had 2,500 responses via the discussion document. We will have more public engagement through the formal public consultation on the draft strategy. COVID permitting, we will have more engagement events as well.

Ms Bailey: OK. Agriculture and farming practices are a big feature of the responses. I am looking ahead to development of the green growth strategy as well. Has the level of response on that, and its being brought to the fore, in this consultation affected any of the conversations or work that is being done in the Department on a specific sustainable farming strategy for Northern Ireland? Historically, we have provided the economic incentives for farming to do bad environmental practice, but we could flip that and give farmers economic incentives for sustainable farming. What is the Department's thinking on that?

Mr Small: Clare, as I said, it is a very busy space at the moment. You mentioned green growth. We need to work out how the green growth framework, which Tracey will talk about, will merge and work alongside the environment strategy. We have climate change and a whole range of challenges around *[Inaudible]*, and all government will be involved in that.

We also have to provide a future agriculture policy as we come out of CAP. We will carefully think through what the future agriculture policy should look like and how we can ensure that it creates a model that not only delivers good food and rewards farming but delivers for the environment. We are taking account of all the issues that we are hearing and the evidence and the data that we can see. We are seeing signs that phosphorus levels in rivers are increasing. Nitrogen levels in marine water bodies are increasing. You mentioned biodiversity. We know that ammonia, for example, is having an impact on our biodiversity and habitats. We are very aware of the points and of the need to begin to address those. The way to address them is to make agriculture more sustainable. The Minister has put sustainability at the heart of the Department's vision, and he is clear that going forward we want agriculture to deliver not only good food but good environmental outcomes. We recognise that there are pressures and that agriculture puts negative pressures on the environment. We need to find ways, be they through research, different farming methods or different technologies, of making agriculture more sustainable. We will try to build that into the future agriculture policy work that other colleagues in the Department are taking forward. We certainly recognise the challenges, and we will attempt to take all those into account.

Ms Bailey: You can recognise the challenges, but they have been there for so long. It is about actions and delivery now. We do not have the time any more, and that is the crucial bit. We know that we have the evidence, the research and the stats. That is all there and has been for a long time. That is my point. This process has been another long, drawn-out one.

Mr Small: OK. Hopefully, when we begin to draft the strategy and set out what we are trying to achieve, we will put more colour into what we need to do. For example, we have developed a set of measures that will reduce ammonia emissions in Northern Ireland. We are in discussions with the Minister about that, and we want to get it launched. We have an environmental farming scheme that is beginning to deliver environmental improvement and outcomes. We want more farmers to get involved in agri-environment and to farm in a sustainable way. There will be other similar programmes and measures whereby we support farmers in that. We have just launched another tranche of the farm business improvement scheme, again supporting environmental measures and low-emission spreading technology. There are a lot of actions that we are taking, but we recognise that we need to

continue with that and to do more. The strategy gives us an opportunity to put a framework around all that.

Mr McGlone: Thanks very much to everybody who presented. I have been looking at the time frame. The previous document was launched on 18 September last year, so we are over a year since that was launched, and I realise and recognise that quite a bit of work has been done on it since then. I note that the time frame, picking up on Clare's point, is for a strategy document to be available around March, with another eight-week consultation period. Have you any projected period for an actual implementation strategy?

Mr Small: I am not sure that we have a specific date in mind, Patsy. We will go through the public consultation on the more detailed strategy proposals when it has all been drafted. It is important that we give time to the public consultation. That will take us into spring next year. At that stage, we will nail down what the strategy content will look like. As I say, there was a strong desire from the respondents that it should be an Executive-endorsed strategy. *[Inaudible]* in the Department if the Minister agrees, there will be another piece of work in taking the strategy to the Executive and gaining Executive support. My hope is that we will have the first-ever environment strategy in Northern Ireland next year, setting out our ambitions to protect and improve the environment and the kind of issues that we will be dealing with. I cannot give you an exact date, but there will be work ahead of us next year. I hope that we will have our first-ever environment strategy in place by the end of next year.

Mr McGlone: Following on from that, is there any benchmark by which you are going to develop it? In other words, is there a strategy in some other part of these islands or maybe some European dynamics, whatever those might be? In other words, what are your criteria for an adequate strategy, as opposed to something that could be dumbed down in order to make it not as adequate as it could be?

Mr Small: As I said, the public consultation exercise will give the public an opportunity to say what they want the strategy to do and whether what we have drafted is appropriate and adequate. We will look at other regions. We are aware of England's 25-year environment plan. We will look at what other regions in the UK are doing and at what is happening in the South. So, yes, we will look abroad to see what is being done.

Some of the challenges that we face in Northern Ireland are similar to the challenges elsewhere, and some are more unique to Northern Ireland. For example, we have a very heavy reliance on agriculture, and some of the issues on agriculture are difficult to deal with, but we will take account of all that and will seek to make the strategy ambitious and worth having because we want the environment strategy to mean something.

Mr McGuigan: David, maybe I misheard you, but I think that you said that you were looking at the opportunities coming from EU withdrawal. I would be quite interested to see what opportunities exist for the environment from EU withdrawal.

Mr Small: I am not sure what I said or what the context was, but I mentioned the Environment Bill and that we have sought to keep options open under that Bill. The Assembly has the opportunity to pick up some of the provisions, and some of those provisions are specifically on future governance arrangements when we lose the governance of the EU. For example, if the Assembly agrees, an office of environmental protection would then operate in Northern Ireland. That is specifically to fill the governance vacuum that we will have when we leave the EU and come out of transition.

There will be opportunities. In some areas of the environment, we will still be locked into some EU requirements under annex 2 of the Northern Ireland protocol, but there will be other environmental areas where we will have a bit more freedom to do things potentially differently, trying to *[Inaudible.]* That is something that we will begin to address.

We have not yet addressed that because so much effort has gone into the work to leave the EU and to work our way out of *[Inaudible.]* That has taken a lot of work, as the Committee well knows, and a lot of our time has been taken up dealing with all that. There will be areas that *[Inaudible]* once we come out of transition, if we have the resource capacity available, to look at areas of work that we have been doing in the way that the EU has told us to do it for the last 40 years, and there are some areas where there might be better ways of managing some of the challenges. So, we will look at those opportunities, but we have not yet got to do that.

Mr McGuigan: OK. I share the frustration of Clare and others about the consultation. It is a good consultation and it was well-responded to from organisations and the public. There are some really good answers, but there are issues that are not new that we could not predict. I have a bit of a concern that it was clear before the consultation that the majority of people here want an independent EPA and a climate Act. I am concerned that we are building all this wrong in the sense that the starting point, whether it is environmental strategies or green growth, should be a climate Act, mirrored with environmental protection legislation rather than the other way round. It could be argued that, if we had a different Minister, rather than being tasked with doing consultations, officials would be devising legislation to put that in place. That is not the fault of civil servants. It is the case, however, that we have known about a lot of these things but have been kicking the can down the road.

Mr Small: I take your point. Clare made the same point. We are all aware of the challenges. For our first ever environment strategy in Northern Ireland, however, it was important to go through an appropriate and detailed public discussion process. You might ask whether we learned anything new from it. We learned that there is a strong desire that it should be an Executive-endorsed strategy, for example, and that is something that we might not have anticipated. The issue *[Inaudible]* there. You might be right. We could be working ahead on some of the issues, and we have been. We have worked on an ammonia reduction plan, and that will *[Inaudible]* soon. We have worked on an air quality strategy that was to have been launched this week. Unfortunately, its launch has had to be delayed for a number of reasons, but it will be launched very soon.

We are working on a range of issues. The Minister has tasked us with drafting legislation on climate change, and we are discussing all of that with the Minister at the moment. We hope that we will be able to move forward with climate change legislation and not wait until we have an environment strategy in place. I kind of understand your point, but it is not that we have not been doing things. We have a range of measures on ammonia and climate change legislation that we are implementing. We are working with all Departments on climate change mitigation measures. We are working with the Department for the Economy on its energy strategy and with the Department for Infrastructure on transportation initiatives that will help address climate change and some of the challenges that it will bring.

Whilst we were preparing the first environment strategy, and we had to pick a point in time in which to do that, at the same time, we were delivering on a range of other interventions and programmes. When we have the environment strategy in place, that will create a strong framework within which we can continue to update its sister strategies. We will move as quickly as we can on the environment strategy.

Mr McGuigan: When will we see an ammonia strategy?

Mr Small: I hope within the next couple of months. It is a very complex and challenging issue. It will be challenging for the industry, and we will need to work out how we support the industry to deal with it. We recently launched a new tranche of our farm business investment scheme, the environmental measures and support *[Inaudible]* there, including low emissions spreading. We are encouraging and promoting that through education and communication, but we want to get to a point at which we have a formal reduction plan in place for Northern Ireland. Hopefully, we will be getting to that point within the next couple of months.

Mr McGuigan: There is obviously engagement in the sector now, but, after the production and publication of the strategy, will there be engagement or a consultation process done on that strategy and all the other strategies that you are looking at?

Mr Small: I suppose that we *[Inaudible.]* Clare mentioned the issue of public participation. As we draft the environment strategy, we will be talking to stakeholders and other partners. We will then go through a *[Inaudible]* formal public consultation process on the draft strategy, after which it hopefully can be launched. On issues such as the green growth strategy, the environment strategy and agriculture pressures, we recognise the need to have continued public participation. We just need to work out how we do that.

Mr McGuigan: OK. Thank you very much.

Mr Harvey: Thank you, David, Simon, Tracey and Arron. David, the consultation was interesting, I must admit. There are 11 interesting questions, and more interesting answers, definitely. I will go through a few wee points. Historic tourism and heritage tourism are mentioned. That is very good. I

hope that motor tourism will be in there as well. On transport, congestion is mentioned, but one wee word appears after it that made me think "Whoops", and that is "charge". I am not sure how that would go down.

The document states, "Renewable energy should be affordable." That is a really good point. If we want things to be renewable, they really should be affordable. The time taken to get renewables on the ground seems to be an issue as well. I will go through them all, if that is OK. It will be easier for you. National parks are mentioned. I know that a lot of people are interested in national parks, but landowners need to be on board, as they can be a controversial subject. The point:

"renewable energy sources should be easier to construct"

follows on from my other point. The suggestion about:

"reducing food waste at all stages from production through to consumption & disposal"

is a good one.

A few wee comments on those, David, would be appreciated.

Mr Small: There was quite a bit in there. You mentioned tourism and the outdoors. A healthy, attractive and beautiful environment does an awful lot to support tourism. It attracts international visitors and those from closer to home. Tourism is in there because of the potential that a good, clean environment offers. It also underpins the point of why it is important that we do what we can to protect our environment, which is that there are lots of spin-off benefits from doing so.

You mentioned the energy strategy that is under way. There is a lot of potential there. You mentioned renewables. We have already done extremely well in Northern Ireland with renewable electricity. I cannot remember the figure that the Minister quotes, but I think that 40%-plus — perhaps getting towards 50% — of our electricity comes from renewable sources. We are doing really well on renewable electricity, but there is a lot of potential to do more.

We have made good progress on food waste. Some of the regulations that have come in over the past few years have encouraged householders to manage their food waste in a better way. They also encourage the retail sector and the hospitality sector to deal with food waste better. We have seen a very significant reduction in food waste. From that, you then have various other benefits, such as a reduction in greenhouse gases. The environment strategy and the initiatives that we hopefully will include in it will create a whole range of opportunities: for green jobs, potentially, in the renewables sector; for tourism; and for outdoor activities. That became more important under lockdown and with COVID restrictions, as having beautiful places to visit was about the only thing that we had sometimes.

All the issues that you have highlighted underpin why it is important to have a strong environment strategy in place, with good public participation and strong governance arrangements that hold us all to account for what we are doing. We have an awful lot to do to bring about behavioural change right across Northern Ireland, at an individual level and for sectors in which we need to start to do things differently. There is not going to be an overnight solution, but, hopefully, the environment strategy will set the very clear direction in which we need to go in Northern Ireland if we are serious about protecting our environment and our natural capital and having the natural ecosystem benefits that all of that provides. We need clean water, clean air and strong and healthy soils for agriculture. All of that tells us that an environment strategy will be very important for Northern Ireland.

Mr Harvey: The last points that you made are ones that also benefit health in general, so that is very good. I look forward to seeing the key themes and what the goals are. Thank you very much.

Mr Irwin: Thank you for your presentation. I apologise that I was not here in time to hear it all.

It is vital that we get the environment strategy right. I am a farmer and have farmed all my life. Agriculture will play its part. Farmers want to help, but they will need guidance and financial help to change the way in which some things are done. The new scheme will help with that in some regard, but we need to put things into perspective and be careful that we do not damage our own agriculture industry at a time when the UK as a whole is importing 40% of its food from other regions, and that really does contribute to global warming. Our global warming contribution is so small, at 0.04%. Yes, I

agree that we need to do something, but we need to be realistic and sensible in what we do. Getting it right and taking a balanced approach is very important.

Mr Small: I agree with you. As I said, the Minister has put sustainability at the heart of the Department's vision. That was an important and clear message that came from the Minister early on. Agriculture has very positive impacts on the environment, but it also has some negative impacts. From talking to colleagues in the agriculture industry, I now think that there is a desire in the industry not only to keep itself competitive and profitable but to begin to manage those negative impacts, because I do not think that the industry wants to have a negative impact on the environment and on water *[Inaudible]* I believe that the industry wants to work with the Department, Yes, where there are problems, address those problems. The Department might have to help it do that, but if, in the end, we have a sustainable, profitable and competitive industry, it will have been well worthwhile.

Although Northern Ireland's contribution to greenhouse gas challenges and climate change is tiny in global terms, William, we nevertheless want to do our bit. When it comes to the other, more specific environmental challenges around habitats, biodiversity and water quality, through technology and research, there are ways in which the industry can change how farming is delivered that will reduce those negative impacts. That will be a really positive thing to do, but *[Inaudible]* the policy, at the same time, we have to make sure that the industry continues to be competitive with the competitors that you referred to, and profitable. As you said, we need to try to achieve a balance and get those two things working together.

Mr Irwin: Absolutely. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): I go to John Blair.

Mr Blair: Chair, can you hear me?

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Yes, we can hear you, but now you have frozen, John.

Mr Blair: I apologise to our guests. I was waiting, so I missed the presentation, but I thank them for their comprehensive report, which I have read in detail.

I have a couple of questions stemming from it. The first is on waste management. What more can be done to achieve consistency across the council areas? For example, in my area, which straddles two legacy council areas, it became perfectly clear to me that the triple-stack system, where recyclable waste is separated by the household, was more successful for recycling than previous systems. Even in that one council area, there were and, to an extent, still are two different systems operating. Some councils do not use that separation system at all. I am keen to know what more can be done to achieve that consistency and therefore get results.

My second question is on the environment strategy. I look forward to the further stages of it. For me, regrettably, what was missing, even in the campaign responses section, at annex A from page 30, was a focus on how to involve the community to a greater level. The Department does community outreach work in some of its business areas, and I am not disputing for a moment the value of a departmental or agency PR campaign on the environment. Surely, perhaps through arm's-length bodies and councils, it is crucial to engage community organisations, existing environmental groups and volunteers, a good example being those already working on habitat restoration. I am keen to know how we embrace the voluntary sector capacity that is already there, bring it into the work that is being done through the environment strategy and maximise, if possible, engagement across local areas.

Mr Small: I agree totally, John. We want to engage *[Inaudible]* as positively and comprehensively as we can. I will bring Simon in on that in a moment. He may wish to say a bit more about how we do that.

We work closely with the environmental NGOs, so we have a strong relationship with those organisations. We work closely with groups such as Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, which is a proactive and positive organisation. I agree with you that, if there is more that we can do by working with local and community groups that are doing good things for the environment, we should be doing that. If we can build on that community involvement, that will be a good thing.

On waste, the approach that we have had up to now is not to direct councils on how they should deliver but to set clear goals for what we want to achieve on recycling. Northern Ireland, as you know,

has done remarkably well. I think that our most recent figure was just below 52% of household waste recycled. The Minister is very keen that we push that to a higher percentage, and we will be setting a target for that. We have therefore done quite well, despite the fact that there has not been total consistency.

We have launched a household recycling waste collaborative change programme, which will run for a number of years. It is worth something like £23 million. Councils can bid into that programme to enhance their recycling facilities and their approach to recycling. We hope that that will create an opportunity and a mechanism to get a bit more consistency.

It has not been our role or preference to direct councils on how they do it. We are developing a pretty strong relationship now with councils. We meet them regularly at a strategic level, and those are the kinds of issues that we can continue to discuss with chief executives, such as whether, at some point, there is merit in councils coming together in a more consistent way. If that delivers better results, it is something that we will be considering.

Simon, do you want to say something further about public participation and working with local groups?

Mr Webb: Thanks, David. You mentioned Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful. The Department funds a large number of third parties through its environment fund, out of the revenue raised from the carrier bag levy. We have provided substantial funding to Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful. It involves very large numbers of volunteers, including for the Big Spring Clean, which is the largest volunteer event in Northern Ireland each year. Community involvement is therefore very much something that we want to build on, and we will be making it a central theme of the strategy in the coming months. The Minister has made the point that everyone, both individuals and communities, has their part to play.

Mr Small: That is something that we will continue to focus on. As Simon said, through the environment fund, we fund a lot of local groups and initiatives, which are all very successful and deliver well. We will want to continue to build on that.

Mr Blair: Thank you both for that.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Clare, you want back in for a question.

Ms Bailey: Thank you, Chair. You have talked about an awful lot of strategies being worked up, and that is great. Philip asked specifically about the ammonia strategy, which, you said, is due to be delivered within the next few months. You said that you are working closely with the sector on how to deliver that. Is there any public participation in the development of these strategies?

Mr Small: We had a number of stakeholder events on ammonia, at which we had environmental NGOs, Friends of the Earth and the agriculture industry. It was really through those stakeholder events that we began to develop what we thought would be the most appropriate measures to help to reduce ammonia across Northern Ireland. We are at a point at which we have a plan of mitigation measures that we believe will help move Northern Ireland in a better direction on ammonia and begin to reduce ammonia levels. Our plan is to go out to further public consultation on that plan, seeking views from industry, the wider community and environmental NGOs.

Ms Bailey: I get that. I feel that consulting stakeholders is very different from public participation. If we are trying to look forward to a public participation model and engagement, is anything being done currently, or are we still stuck on sector and stakeholder engagement?

Mr Small: We do need to talk to the stakeholders, who have the closest involvement and interest. The public consultation process around it will be a full public consultation process. We will use various measures that will help us reach out, possibly in a better way than we have done in the past. We put a lot of effort into doing that with the environment strategy. We had various public participation events. We worked closely with youth groups to try to reach young people, and that was successful. We got a very strong response back from young people.

Ms Bailey: Yes, but my point, David, is that, if we are going to try to do things differently or develop strategies and policies for the future to deal with all of this, where is the public engagement at the minute? Are we going to do it in the same way in which we have done it before, or what is the thinking? These strategies are going to go hand in hand with delivering green growth, other

environmental strategies, potential climate change legislation and the whole way forward post-Brexit, so are we embedding new ways of engaging at the minute? These strategies have to have longevity.

Mr Small: The environment strategy was possibly our first big attempt to involve citizens and get them participating better than they have done in the past, and I think that that was quite successful. Tracey will probably talk a bit later about the plans for public participation around green growth and for co-design of the measures that we are going to try to take forward. I think that that is becoming a part of how we consult nowadays and going forward, where we are trying to tap better into how the wider community feels about initiatives and about strategies that we are developing. Consultation will not be based on the old-style public consultation, where a big paper goes out to a handful of stakeholders. It will be much broader than that, and I will try to make it participative.

Ms Bailey: Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Can you hear me, Maurice? You are on mute.

Mr M Bradley: Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much for your presentation and for your answers so far. Northern Ireland lags very sadly behind on climate change. As such, we need legal powers and enforcement going forward. We need the "polluter pays principle", not just for the damage that he causes but for the cost of putting that damage right. One of the things that I feel that the Department needs to concentrate on is a planning authority to ensure joined-up thinking across local councils and communities, with clear direction when assessing applications to put the environment first. Are discussions taking place to address that?

Mr Small: There is a thing called extended producer responsibility (EPR), which we are doing jointly across the UK. It is really about producers taking responsibility. I suppose that it is along the lines of "polluter pays", but it involves producers taking responsibility for what they produce and how the waste then needs to be managed, and paying for the cost of that. That is a UK-wide initiative, and Northern Ireland is part of it. We have been part of the early consultations, and further consultations are planned for early next year, so, yes, we are taking forward some of that work, Maurice.

You also said that we are lagging behind on climate change. As you know, a private Member's Bill has been drafted. We in the Department, at the Minister's behest, have also been drafting a consultation on climate change legislation. Our feeling is that, if we are going to do climate change legislation, we need to do it well. I know that there is a desire to do it quickly, and it is about trying to find a balance whereby we do it as quickly as we can but do it comprehensively, do it well and do it in a way that reflects the specific challenges of Northern Ireland. Again, we are working on that issue as well, and we are working on a range of other environmental challenges and the various programmes of work that I have referred to. Northern Ireland is actually doing better than other parts of the UK in some areas. We are definitely not at the bottom of the league table on everything. On household waste recycling, we are doing better than a lot of other areas. On water quality, we are doing better than other areas. However, it is a continual challenge; I do not think that we want to leave it that way. We know that we need to do better, and the environment strategy will set a framework and a context for helping us to do that. The green growth strategy will set a really strong context for Northern Ireland going forward, with a focus on green and on green credentials. Hopefully, if you think we are behind, then we will put ourselves up.

Mr M Bradley: I will ask another wee question there, Chair. The consultation brings out a clear message that not enough trees are being planted, nor are we putting enough emphasis on wildlife and insects to keep them to the fore, particularly when planting bee-friendly flowers in flower beds. I am not being an advocate for insects, but they feed many bird species, and I think that that is something that has always been overlooked in planning applications and so on and so forth. Is the Department working closely with councils to ensure that there are greater planting schemes being rolled out across the country?

Mr Small: I am not sure about what we will be doing with councils, but through things like the environmental farming scheme, we will be working with farmers and supporting farmers to do the kinds of things that you have talked about, whether that is to create woodland or to create species-rich grassland, which will feed our bird population. The environmental farming scheme is something that we are continuing to roll out. We had a recent tranche. Uptake was not as high as we would have liked, but we will continue to promote it. We are planning a further tranche, hopefully, if we can get the approvals to do that. We are working with the Forest Service with regard to increasing afforestation in Northern Ireland. The Forest Service, within the Department, is working with councils and other public

sector bodies around enhanced afforestation and woodland creation. Through the environment fund, which Simon mentioned earlier, we offer support to local communities and councils around creating biodiversity schemes in their local areas that will enhance the environment and also provide one that is species-rich, which will, as you said, attract bees, birds and insects. So we already do quite a lot in that area, but if there are opportunities to do more, then hopefully, through the consultation and the work on the environment strategy, we will capture where those opportunities are. If we feel that there is merit in pursuing those further, then we will.

Mr M Bradley: I have one final one, if I can get permission.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Go ahead, Maurice.

Mr M Bradley: With regard to ammonia being a by-product of urine mixing with cow droppings, what technologies are emerging to separate fluids from solids? Could the separation of fluids from solids reduce the amount of ammonia going into the ground?

Mr Small: Yes. There are lots of technological opportunities and solutions out there, and some of them are still being tested. What is clear is that we need to embrace new technology as far as we can, because that is likely to be part of the solution — either slurry separation technology or developments with regard to animal feed whereby you can reduce the ammonia that is produced through changes to animal feed content. I think that there are lots of opportunities like that where we can help the sector to address the ammonia challenge by using research, new technology, new food and animal feed diets, and by using new technology like low-emission spreading. There is a lot of stuff out there, Maurice, and we need to investigate all of those, and that is what we will be trying to do. The ammonia reduction plan that, hopefully, we will be going to consultation on soon will set out some of those opportunities.

Mrs Barton: Thank you for letting me in again, Chair. Maurice mentioned planning. It is very important that there is consultation with planning. At present, there is a huge problem with planning and agriculture. I know a number of agricultural businesses that have been building more comfortable, safer buildings for their animals and themselves so that they are safer when going in to animals etc. Although the number of animals that are to be put in the shed is not increasing, they are having great difficulty in getting planning permission and are being turned down. There seems to be a bit of a conflict there that needs to be sorted out.

There is also an issue in relation to the keeping of hens. Again, some of these people in poultry production are moving from keeping hens in cages to having them free-range, and there is difficulty with getting planning permission. Even though they are reducing the numbers, they still seem to not want them free-range.

Mr Small: It is not an easy one to address, Rosemary, because a lot of complex issues are involved. You are right: councils are competent authorities under planning law. They make a planning decision, they are the competent authority and they are responsible for that decision. They need to satisfy themselves that they are complying with all relevant rules and environmental legislation, which they are doing, but on some applications they remain concerned. If someone is, for example, putting up a new house which might help to reduce ammonia emissions, councils need to take account of what the current position is. If the current operation already vastly exceeds what is permitted and the development in question would reduce that slightly, they may take the view, "Well, that's not enough because the damage being caused already is far too excessive". I know that this will sound odd, but if an application to put in a more modern house would reduce the ammonia problem slightly but would still breach the rules by an extreme amount, councils may find it difficult to grant planning permission. The solution is the work that we are going to do on ammonia mitigation through an ammonia reduction plan. That will help farmers to manage ammonia levels on their farms through the technology that we have talked about and different farming approaches. At the moment, I agree: some applications are getting caught. That is very frustrating for the farmer, and probably costly, because they have paid for planning consultants and paid for their application and so on.

The same applies to the example of the henhouses, where some are moving to open, free-range hens. Again, it depends on the individual circumstances of a planning application and the level of ammonia emissions that is already being experienced. What I am picking up is that sometimes it is so high that it would remain too high even with a reduction. That takes us into the whole area of planning, and it is complex; it is by no means straightforward. It is something that we are very aware of. We will

try to work with the Department for Infrastructure and with planning, alongside our own work on ammonia reduction, to try to find a solution to that.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): One of the things that I did not note in great detail in the strategy was the fact that we share jurisdiction with the South of Ireland. Obviously, issues around environmental protection do not recognise any type of border at all. What level of engagement have you had with the relevant Department in the South of Ireland?

Mr Small: We have good relationships with colleagues in the South. Our international water bodies' catchment areas, for example, are transboundary; they cross the border. We have very good cooperation in place with the South in terms of the mechanisms and measures that are needed to address some of the water issues. We have been talking with Republic of Ireland colleagues specifically about the ammonia challenges. They have ammonia challenges too in the South. Unfortunately, our ammonia levels here are higher, so we have that challenge to deal with. We work closely with colleagues in the South on the various measures that we are jointly contemplating. Ammonia is a transboundary issue, because we have farms working in border areas where some of the ammonia problem that affects a designated site beside them is coming from across the border; it is damaging the site in the North. They will do what they can on their farm to reduce ammonia levels, but that might not be enough to protect that designated site, because some of the harm is coming from across the border. It works the other way on occasions too. Transboundary issues are something that we deal with, and continued engagement with colleagues in the South will be important. It will be important to manage those transboundary issues, but sometimes they will be difficult to manage.

Mr McGuigan: Thanks for letting me in again, Chair. A lot of the issues that we are talking about are complex and have competing narratives, and we have to sort out issues in a progressive manner. This is not at the level of climate change and all those things, but the level of fly-tipping and littering that we see here is really frustrating. I raise this all the time. My political perspective does not normally allow me to support heavy law-and-order enforcement, but there must be something that we can do. It is obviously a cultural issue. I just cannot fathom why people would throw litter in either small or large amounts. Can we produce a strategy that is actually going to be effective and tackle this issue?

Mr Small: I will let Simon come in, Philip, in case there is something specific around that. Look, I agree with you. Waste crime is a problem not just in Northern Ireland but right across the UK and in other regions, including the South. Unfortunately, there are individuals out there who will attempt either to save money by simply tipping their waste, or to make money by charging people to take their waste away and then dumping it. Unfortunately, that is something that we have to deal with. The NIEA works closely with councils on the responsibility for clearing up when fly-tipping happens. By and large, we try to do that as well as we can. You will get the odd occasion when something goes wrong, something is missed and it becomes a bigger problem but, by and large, councils and the NIEA work together pretty well on that.

Simon, I am not sure if fly-tipping has come up specifically as an issue in the environment strategy discussion process, or whether we have given any particular thought to whether that is a theme that we could consider in the context of the environment strategy.

(The Deputy Chairperson [Mr McGuigan] in the Chair)

Mr Webb: The specific issue of littering was quite a common theme that came up in the responses to the discussion document. It is very much an area that we expect to focus on as we draft the strategy. My team has specific responsibility for legislation on littering. The last big piece of legislation on this issue was the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, so it is an area that we need to look at and update. We are conducting a review of the fixed penalty notices of up to £80 which councils can issue for littering. We have a marine litter strategy, of course, but we do not have a terrestrial litter strategy. That is very much an area that we expect to expand on in the environment strategy. We will include the outcome of the review of fixed penalty notices. For example, the penalty available in Northern Ireland is, as I say, up to £80, but more recent legislation in England allows fines of up to £150.

Mr Small: Thanks, Simon. We will look at this within the context of the strategy.

Mr Webb: Absolutely, yes.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr McGuigan): The Chair has gone out, so I am taking over chairing the meeting.

Mr Irwin: I have a quick question about planning, and I am sure that David will be aware of this. There are many farm buildings that were built in the 70s that are probably at the end of their life. If those farms are not allowed to modernise and replace those old buildings, it will have ramifications for the future of agriculture in that the next generation of young people will not be able to stay on the farm. This must be addressed. In many cases, as has been mentioned, there are no increases in ammonia levels, but a modernisation of that yard is needed to try to continue. Again, it is down to getting a strategy in place that allows that to happen, because this is vital for the future. If we do not let this happen, it will have ramifications for the next generation of farmers.

Mr Small: I agree, William. As you say, we both know that there is a very difficult problem at the moment. I agree with you: if farmers are not able to update and modernise those farm buildings, that will have an impact on the farm's viability, so we need to work that out and find a solution. I think that the solution is somewhere in how our ammonia reduction strategy, if it is ambitious enough, can allow greater latitude and discretion in how we apply the environmental rules in the planning system. We need to find a way to get to a point where farm buildings can be modernised, because that will help reduce ammonia emissions and it is important for the farm viability. We have been doing that work, William, as you know, for some time, and we are hopefully getting closer to a point where we will go out to consultation on a set of proposals that will begin to lead to a better direction on all that. I totally recognise that it is a problem at the minute. The Minister recognises it too, and is very keen to find a solution. We will meet him again to discuss how we take all that forward.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr McGuigan): I think that is all the questions for David. Tracey, you have been sitting patiently, so we will move to you.

Ms Tracey Teague (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): Thank you, Philip. I found it hard not to chip in there, but I am here today to talk about green growth, so thank you for the opportunity to brief the Committee.

First and foremost, I want to say that we are at the start of this green growth journey, and a lot of what you will hear today will be a reflection of the thinking to date and the ideas, opportunities and challenges that we have identified. I hope that you will clearly see the link with the environment strategy that David has updated you on, because the environment strategy will be one of the key strategies that sits at the heart of this green growth framework, and it will set the tone for environmental protection and the improvements that we are looking for in the next few decades.

Following initial engagement with Executive colleagues, Minister Poots launched green growth as a concept in a statement to the Assembly on 23 June, and, since then, in the past three or four months, officials have progressed work in this area, mainly through extensive engagement with NICS colleagues, particularly in the Economy and Infrastructure Departments, and with a broad range of external stakeholders from the business sector, the environment sector and local government. This has been the start of what we call our co-design process for developing the strategy. We do not have all the answers; that is for sure. The expertise lies in many other areas, and, without doubt, a collaborative approach is going to be needed for the green growth framework to be successful.

Today's meeting with the Committee is an opportune time for us to bring you up to speed on where we are but also, at this early stage in the process, to seek your views on how the green growth concept, strategy and delivery framework are all shaped. I will do a bit of recapping on the rationale for the approach that has been taken and outline the plans for the co-design and delivery framework.

On the rationale, you will probably find that I am reiterating quite a bit of what David said, but there are clearly a number of drivers at play. The UK Government are committed to achieving net zero carbon by 2050, which means a radical change of context for our economy towards a more economically and environmentally sustainable model that is based on innovation and recognises the true value of the environment, and the development of our people so that they can drive this new economy. Climate change has demonstrated beyond all doubt that our environment, our economy and our society are entirely interdependent, so effectively tackling the major challenge that it presents cannot be addressed in isolation through a raft of disparate strategies and plans. That is a lesson that has been reinforced by our recent experience in dealing with COVID: we definitely emerge stronger when we work together.

The green growth strategy will be the Northern Ireland Executive's approach to recognising that interdependency. It will ensure collaborative action, optimise our efforts and minimise the risk of unintended consequences. Aligned with the Programme for Government and the New Decade, New Approach commitments, the aim is that it will provide a route map to ensure that we work together to value our environmental assets, grow those assets and, in doing so, grow our economy. We have a big ambition and aim here. It is broader than just the net zero target. We are talking about protecting and enhancing our environment and delivering sustainable economic growth, and this society will benefit from those outcomes.

How are we going to do that? We have two key elements to the green growth approach: a strategy that extends to 2050 but which will include immediate, medium-term and long-term actions; and a delivery framework that includes a series of foundation programmes and partnership agreements to create momentum and, hopefully, deliver the necessary change. We are very keen to demonstrate the strategy in action on the ground, so we see those elements running in parallel. On the co-design process, I will give you a feel for what we have been dealing with through feedback from our stakeholder engagement. As we have said, it will require collaboration across the Executive and with stakeholders beyond local government and certainly in the business and voluntary and community sectors. We have been engaging with all of them, seeking their views on the need for this green growth approach, how they think it should be developed, opportunities to make an impact on our climate and what we should do to improve the economy while considering the balance of the economy and the environment. It has been very well received by all stakeholders so far. We are also establishing a number of stakeholder groups that will be invited to continue to work with us on the co-design, and I have given you an example of that — the diagram — in your briefing paper. In some ways, I hope that that will show the public participation that is very clearly needed. You will see that we have set up a series of mechanisms, one of which is the green growth community. That is very much, in terms of what Clare was talking about, in the public participation arena.

At this stage, we know the big players whom we want to involve in the co-design process. They include the business sector, the voluntary and community sector, academics, the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) and environmental NGOs. I will give you a sense of some of the feedback that we have been provided with. They said that we need to build relationships with key delivery partners; that we must create a level of awareness, understanding and enthusiasm for green growth; that we must, working with others, identify and develop the opportunities and ideas; that we should identify those measures that offer the most opportunity towards achieving net zero; that we must reassure both environmental and business interests of the shared goals and ambitions; that we must encourage policy areas across the NICS to integrate green-growth thinking into future policy; and that there must be investment in this ambitious but much-needed plan. One of the key messages to come through is that green growth provides an opportunity to join the dots and that, in the past, there has been, in some ways, a bit of a gap or something missing.

In the co-design process, as well as taking on board all the stakeholder views and bringing together the right people, we will look at best practice elsewhere and lessons learned. In parallel with that, we have also started work on the delivery framework. This will consist of a range of programmes that, together, will contribute to cross-cutting targets and outcomes. There will be a mix of policies, strategies and on-the-ground plans of action. Key strategies will include the one that David just outlined: the environment strategy. You can see how ambitious that is, given its scope. We also have the economy strategy, the transport strategy and the energy strategy. We have begun our conversations with Departments about how this will all come together and fit. Using all of those policies and strategies, the aim is, to coin a phrase that somebody used, to walk us from where we are today to where we want to be. The key themes emerging are agriculture, transport, energy, waste management and business. Again, that is in your briefing pack. To start the process, we identified those themes to start to take us forward.

We have also made a start through the development of foundation programmes. The first, which you will be aware of, was Forests for our Future, which the Minister launched. As you will know, its aim is to plant 18 million trees by 2030. It is a mix of matching the economy with the environment. It will create jobs. In the forestry sector, there will be in the region of 1,000 rural jobs. There will also be around £60 million per annum from timber production. It is about trying to join up those links between the economy and the environment.

In addition, to help to shape the delivery framework going forward, Minister Poots has recently written to his Executive colleagues requesting their assistance to scope indicative proposals for new or enhanced interventions, along with broad estimates of the costs and benefits with regard to

greenhouse gas mitigations and the economic growth potential. We are waiting on those returns coming in.

Hopefully, I have articulated our vision of what we are trying to do. We have an overarching strategy that will be underpinned and supported by a delivery framework on the ground. It is for 30 years. It should be recognised that it will not be an overnight success; it will take some time. Having provided you with the outline of how it is shaping up, it is, probably, worth mentioning two other important elements; metrics and governance.

The impacts of green growth — the strategy itself, its aims and objectives, and all the elements in it — all need to be monitored, evaluated and reported on over time, so that success can be measured and corrective action taken where necessary. In particular, it will be important to establish baselines. At this stage of the process, it has been decided that carbon emissions will be used as the primary measure for poor productivity, environmental damage and health risks. That will allow us to prioritise those actions that best reduce emissions and promote productivity, environmental enhancement, and health and well-being. David touched on some of those.

Importantly, while carbon will be the primary policy measure, other measures will be used within each theme and to monitor each element of the delivery framework and the strategy's progress generally. Therefore, it is not to say that we will measure carbon but not measure water quality or biodiversity improvement. I just want to be really clear that it is not seen solely through that lens. That means that we will also look at the environmental indicators that are set out in the Programme for Government and the commitments that are contained in 'New Decade, New Approach'. To take that forward, we have set up a green growth metrics strand of the project, and we have had interest from external scientific and academic organisations, including the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and Queen's University, that are keen to offer support in that arena.

On governance, again, just to keep everybody abreast of what is happening, we are definitely applying best practice in taking that forward. We have agreed governance structures, and have taken steps to implement a few of the initial priority governance arrangements that we need.

First, in line with that commitment in his statement to the Assembly, the Minister has written to Ministers Dodds, Mallon, Murphy and Ní Chuilín to invite them to join a green growth inter-ministerial group. A date has been agreed for that meeting later this month. Together, those Ministers will help to steer the green growth agenda for the Executive and the people of Northern Ireland.

Secondly, there is a green growth strategic oversight group. The group's role is to provide oversight of and input into the strategy design phase of our work. It will comprise senior representatives from the business areas in DAERA and across other Departments. They will ensure that it will be an integrated, well-communicated and well-developed strategy. It will include subject-matter experts.

Finally, I would like to paint a picture of what lies ahead, and the priority work with the division. Over the next six months, our focus will be firmly on progressing the co-design of the strategy and framework. We are actively building expertise in what is a very small team doing a very significant piece of work. Following the feedback from the engagement to date, we are currently taking a stocktake of all that information, insights and views received. We are finalising the formation of the various stakeholder groups that we will be involved with in the co-design. We have also been establishing a range of mechanisms that will allow businesses and organisations to demonstrate their commitment to the aim of green growth and be recognised for doing so.

We have had huge interest in this. Of course, we want to engage with the Committee further as the progress develops. We want to ensure that you have sight of that progress. However, very importantly, I would like to take the opportunity to ask for your early views on the approach and development of the green growth strategy and on what you have heard today with regard to how we will take forward the delivery framework.

One point that I must highlight is that, in all of this, we are very conscious of the competing priorities that exist across the NICS, not least the challenges ahead concerning EU transition and COVID-19. We are also conscious of the important role that green growth will have in helping us to achieve the fundamental change that will be required in society over the next 30 years. Therefore, it is crucial that we plan the process properly, engage people effectively and seek appropriate support. At the minute, that is exactly what we intend to do.

It is a challenge. It is overarching for the Executive. It is bringing everything together. Some have used the term "the wrapper", the piece of work that will join all the dots.

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to make these opening remarks. Arron, the programme director, and I will be more than happy to receive your feedback and answer any questions.

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr McGuigan): Thank you very much, Tracey, for that fulsome overview of where we are.

As I said to David, the green growth strategy is well supported. It is vitally important to our businesses and community that we plan and that there is some certainty for businesses in future development. It seems to me that this green growth strategy would have been better under the umbrella of a climate Act that would have given industry and other sectors certainty with regard to targets for carbon reduction. I am not saying that it is not good that we are working on and progressing a green growth strategy. It would have been better sitting under a climate Act and allowing certainty.

You spoke about the groups involved in community participation. You did not mention trade unions. It is important that trade unions and workers are included at every step, and that just transition principles are followed, so that we are not leaving people behind, people have certainty and feel part of and engaged in the process.

It is a 20- or 30-year strategy, and you outlined some of the work that is going on. Do you envisage the actual strategy being up and running in this mandate, for example, or when can we see certainty on that?

Ms Teague: I take the point that you raised earlier about a climate change Act and the order that we are doing this in. However, we are still committed to this, and a lot of it aligns with the same overall target of net zero carbon by 2050.

I would be convinced that we have the unions noted as one of our key stakeholder groups, so I will pick that up as an action point to make sure that that is checked. The unions will certainly be part of that green growth community that we flagged.

Regarding timelines, initially, we had a target to have a draft strategy out by March 2021. At this stage, with the wealth of information coming in, the wealth of input into the beginning of the co-design process and some people being tied up on the EU transition and COVID, our aim will be to work towards that. At this stage, I would be pretty confident that this will happen in the current mandate.

(The Chairperson [Mr McAleer] in the Chair)

Mr McGuigan: OK, thank very much.

Mr McGlone: We heard all this stuff in the past about the green deal, and it is good to see the Department focusing on that. Tracey spoke about working with other Departments. I am interested specifically in the economic benefits of green deal and green opportunities. In liaising and working with the Department for the Economy specifically and, more specifically, with Invest NI, are formal opportunities — and there are plenty of opportunities — being explored, as they should be?

Ms Teague: Absolutely. We have met, so far, with Invest NI and the Department for the Economy. They were quite different meetings in terms of what we covered, but they were about similar issues. With Invest NI, we talked about how we will engage businesses in terms of the focus on the environment in their business plans and looking ahead at the potential for green jobs as we change some of the direction of travel in areas such as hydrogen.

The Department for the Economy's energy division is developing its own energy strategy to 2050, and we engage with it in that area. It is a member of the strategic oversight group, so again, we are trying to join up the dots there. On the economy side, you will appreciate that the Department for the Economy has a lot of issues to deal with right now. Our conversations have been around the immediate pressures on the economy as a result of COVID-19. However, that Department is completely wedded to the future that we are trying to articulate, Patsy, for the longer term and green jobs. We are at the early stage of this, but we are already engaging and in early conversations with the two parties that you have mentioned.

Mr McGlone: What kind of strategic involvement and feedback are they giving to help develop the overall strategy?

Ms Teague: This is early engagement, and they will be brought into a green growth forum. Around that table, we will have a strategic oversight group, comprised of senior representatives at grade 3 level, that is deputy permanent secretary, and then for economy, transport, energy and agriculture — the themes that I talked about — will each have somebody covering those. They will be members of the strategic oversight group. Underneath that, there will be green growth forum. This will be comprised of subject-matter experts and bodies such as Invest NI. They are all going to be invited; some have already been invited into the structure that we have put in place to design the strategy.

Mr McGlone: OK. That is grand. Thank you very much for that.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you, Patsy and Tracey. Clare, are you there?

Ms Bailey: I have been hijacked by my cat, sorry. Is it possible for the Committee to have details or lists of who is being engaged and at what level? Tracey mentioned that the big players are involved in the co-design, that there is other engagement with stakeholders and that there are moves to hopefully have public participation in this. Is that something that we could request?

Ms Teague: Yes, do you want the detail?

Ms Bailey: Yes.

Ms Teague: I will go to Arron, because I think that we have already identified the majority of these. I know, Clare, that there is a huge amount of people banging at the door to be involved in this, and our biggest challenge is managing that through a virtual room. That is our plan. We would, more or less, have everyone identified. The big one is the green growth community. We would need to be careful how we manage that one, but it is a very important one, Clare. This is public participation, as I see it, and that is what you have been asking for.

Ms Bailey: Yes.

Ms Teague: Arron, do you want to come in? *[Long Pause.]* Arron, I think you are on mute. *[Long Pause.]* Clare, you cannot hear Arron can you?

Ms Bailey: No, I cannot. *[Inaudible.]* Is it possible to forward those details to the Committee?

Ms Teague: I do not see a problem with that, so long as the people who are involved are aware of it.

Ms Bailey: Great. We have just gone through the environment strategy, we are looking at green growth again, and, as you have rightly said, carbon is being used as the main upfront output measure. You have acknowledged that other measures will also be used, particularly on green growth, and that is really important. I would like to come back to the environmental enhancement and the levels of monitoring that are being considered. If carbon is front and centre, what baselines will be used? We know that carbon is not the only factor in polluting our air and our waterways. What will be used as a baseline for that environmental enhancement?

I am asking, again, within the context of the Environment Bill that is going through Westminster, where the baselines were not set. It is not Northern Ireland-specific and we are being left in a legislative void. If the strategy is coming up, what are being used as baselines and how will enhancement be measured?

Ms Teague: Clare, that is why we have identified a work stream. In some ways, we want one version with the truth on what the baseline is and what we are trying to get to. We have set up a work strand to look at that and develop the metrics. We have information on water quality and have development under way on the Programme for Government indicators. All of those will have to be captured, Clare. Not all of them will be owned by DAERA. A number of these measurements will be owned by others, for example, the transport and energy divisions, so there is work to be done on baselining that, and we have set up a particular work strand to baseline everything, including where we are starting from and where we want to get to.

The overarching one is easy to do because you can sit and say you want net zero carbon by 2050, but there are other ones on biodiversity and water quality, for example. Our water quality, as you know, is sitting at 36% or 37% and, previously, there was an EU target to reach 70%. Then we have the P and N issues that David mentioned. There is still work to be done in setting those targets, which goes back to what David was saying earlier about the environment strategy, but this will all have to tie in. I am afraid that I cannot give you the exact answers right now, because there is more work to be done on what those targets will be.

Ms Bailey: OK. I declare an interest: I am lobbying for net zero by 2045.

Ms Teague: Some people are lobbying for 2040, so do not be worried.

Ms Bailey: Those baselines concern me, and I will put that out there. We do not have a legislative framework, and we are in breach of quite a few bits of legislation in terms of environmental measures or outputs. Without that legal framework, if we do not have that backed up with setting those baselines, we will be on a trajectory that we should not be on. We are starting from a very low baseline because of the damage and the environmental context that we are in, particularly with biodiversity and pollution. How will the baseline be monitored? What are the conversations? What is the thinking behind how this will be monitored?

Ms Teague: It is early days, Clare, because we do not have the strategy developed, but we are already thinking about the fact that this will need careful monitoring. We have an inter-ministerial group, and, at the end of this month, we will be discussing the overall ambition with that group. Sitting underneath that, we will have sister strategies, as we call them, and we will need to align them and say, "What target is being set down for the economy? What is being set down for transport? What is being set down in terms of future agricultural policy?". The monitoring will then take place through the strategic oversight group that will be steering the whole framework. I have heard some people comment that the green growth framework should keep us on our toes, keep us monitoring and keep us making sure that we are doing the right thing and heading towards these targets. That is all to be developed, Clare, but that is our thinking at the minute, and that is why the governance arrangements of that oversight group have been established pretty early on.

Ms Bailey: OK. I have in my head the Going for Growth strategy, which was rolled out and delivered but had no environmental impact assessment carried out on it. We are not looking at baselines yet and that is an ongoing conversation, but current monitoring has shown us where we are in breach, yet action is not being taken there either. All that is under development. Will this strategy be subject to an environmental impact assessment? Could that then be used to build from in setting those moving forward?

Ms Teague: We will certainly look at that, Clare. At this stage, as I say, we are thinking all those things through. We want to monitor each element of the delivery framework that I talked about. For example, Forests for the Future is a foundation programme, and monitoring is already built into that. There has to be a mechanism to capture all that and then to monitor this throughout. You are thinking, "This is what we want to hear from you today. What are the important things that we need to build into the whole process?". We do not want to miss anything. If it is going to be 30 years in the making, we want it to be well developed, well monitored and well executed, and that is the plan, Clare. I am not answering some of your questions because we are still thinking those things through.

Ms Bailey: OK. Thanks. My suggestion is that the environmental impact of both the environment strategy and the green growth strategy should be assessed before we go anywhere with them.

Ms Teague: Thanks, Clare.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): John Blair is next on the list. Are you online, John? Can you hear us? I know that he was having connection problems. We will move round to William and maybe come back to John.

Mr Irwin: Thanks, Tracey, for the presentation. I think that the green growth strategy is very important to the future. The agri-food industry is worth £4.9 billion in sales and creates up to 100,000 jobs. Its future is vital. We are the envy of many across Europe. We have a thriving agri-food sector. Am I right in saying that the green growth strategy will have to work in tandem with the environment strategy that David talked about earlier?

Ms Teague: Absolutely, William. DAERA and our colleagues will have agri-food as a particular theme. We are working on that with our food and farming group colleagues. Obviously, it is linked to the future agricultural policy. It is looking at the sustainability issues that we mentioned earlier. They are very much joined up and aligned. It is about getting that balance between protecting the environment and ensuring that growth can still happen.

Mr Irwin: Yes, that is vital for the future. Getting there is a big task; I understand that.

Ms Teague: We will be looking at these issues. I will not take away from what the food and farming group in DAERA will be doing, but our conversations with them have been along the lines of technology in the future, what they will be doing differently and how they can better educate farmers and give them time and help to get there. That is the type of conversation that we are having, William.

Mr Irwin: That is good. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): I will ask this question on behalf of John Blair because his connection is down. Will the delivery plan have a time frame?

Ms Teague: In some ways, the delivery plan has already kicked off. The strategy has a timeline in that we certainly want to develop a strategy and get it out in this mandate. In some respects, the delivery framework is happening as we speak. While it is not fully articulated, we are not letting the grass grow under us. If there is something that we can do, we will do it. Forests for our Future has already kicked off. We are also taking work forward what are being called green growth agreements. Companies and firms are coming to us and saying, "We want to work with you". To give you a flavour of that, we have been talking to Tourism NI, the National Trust, the CBI and Belfast Harbour Commissioners. The number of people who are engaged in this process is quite significant. We are aiming to develop some pilot work with them on a delivery framework. The delivery framework has actually kicked off. We might not have a narrative nicely worded yet — we will do so over the coming months — but it is already in action.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): John is also asking whether the community strand can include schools, local enterprise agencies and community organisations, in addition to Invest NI.

Ms Teague: Yes. Again, we are doing some work in that area. Is he talking about the community strand of the green growth strategy?

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Yes.

Ms Teague: We will certainly look at that and make sure that the list is complete and wide-ranging.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): OK. Thank you.

Mr M Bradley: Thank you very much for the presentation, Tracey. My question is on the same theme as John's. Unfortunately, we live in a throwaway society; a careless society, I might add. There needs to be massive education on green growth, and there are no greater educators than children. Children educate adults. I remember when my twin grandchildren were of an age when they sat in the back of the car and [*Inaudible*] to me because I did not have my seat belt on. I now wear a seat belt all the time. Does the Department intend to engage with the education system to encourage greater participation in protecting the environment and reducing waste?

Ms Teague: Maurice, we already do a bit of that through Eco-Schools. There is already a very successful programme in place. We are not going to drop that. If anything, we will build on it because it is a great success story. On green growth itself, we had already identified with Arron and the team that we would do more work with young people. When you think about it, this is a 30-year strategy. I hope that you do not mind me saying it, but we are sitting here at a certain age developing a strategy that is actually for, dare I say it, my children and grandchildren. It is really important that we engage the young people in it.

I have also read the work that Simon did on the environment strategy, on which there was a lot of engagement with the young people. That information will also feed into the green growth framework as we develop it. More specifically on the green growth, we are engaging with the young people — the

young citizens, as we have identified them. The Eco-Schools programme is very good in what it does. I hope that that answers your question.

Mr M Bradley: It does indeed. Thanks very much, Tracey. There is no greater future than the children themselves.

Mrs Barton: Tracey, thank you very much. What engagement have you had with our councils? I know that there has been engagement in relation to the waste strategy, but what other engagement have you had with them?

Ms Teague: There are two councils specifically. Early on, we brought together a reference group and on that we had Belfast City Council's chief executive, Suzanne Wylie, and a representative from Derry City and Strabane council to get early thinking on what the councils were doing. As you know, different councils are at different stages in delivering on this, but it clearly links into their local development plans and the city deals. There are a lot of linkages.

More recently, I had a more detailed conversation with Belfast city centre. The councils that we have dealt with are pretty engaged on this. It has been identified that we will be dealing with all the councils as we go forward, Rosemary, though at the start we had more specific contact with the two bigger councils.

Mrs Barton: Yes, because I am thinking that this is a green growth strategy and those are city areas. I think that perhaps there should be a little bit more engagement in the rural areas —

Ms Teague: Absolutely.

Mrs Barton: — with the rural councils.

Have you taken any steps or in what way are you looking at trying to identify and secure funding to establish programmes of work for the future?

Ms Teague: That is in the pipeline, Rosemary. Minister Murphy is invited to the inter-ministerial group meeting. There are early discussions on that. This will have a cost to it; there is money attached. Obviously, Departments will have bid for their own pieces of work, should that be transport, energy or agriculture, for that matter. That all needs to be identified and considered in the round, including whether there is perhaps a different funding approach going forward, but the discussions are at a fairly early stage.

Mrs Barton: OK, thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Clare, are you looking to come back in?

Ms Bailey: Yes, can you hear me, sorry?

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): We can, Clare.

Ms Bailey: Tracey, I just wanted to follow up on one of the things that you talked about. Where do Departments see sustainable economic growth in this strategy? What areas will be required to focus on a degrowth model?

Ms Teague: The Minister has written to all the Departments to ask what big initiatives they are taking forward that will contribute to net zero and to ask what other benefits those will bring about. We need to do that exercise to look at what is happening across the board and what might take us in a new direction for Northern Ireland. Will energy be our next thing, or will it be tourism? We did the whole staycation thing. Is there a different way to do that? There is a bit of work to look at that sort of landscape, Clare, and then to see where we put the main emphasis and focus.

The Department for the Economy will be looking at green jobs, but it is not a matter for that Department only. As I mentioned, there are jobs in forestry in Forest for Our Future, and there are rural jobs to be thought about. When we get all that in from all the Departments, we will look at it to see what way it is going to take us in sustainable growth. That is all part of the co-design process. We

need to get all the information in, analyse and assess it and consider what way it will shape up for policies and strategies going forward. I can give my view, but I do not have the full information.

Ms Bailey: That is OK, but is there an acknowledgement that some areas will have to be on a degrowth model?

Ms Teague: That particular conversation and those words have not been used yet, Clare. I do not know whether that will happen naturally in some areas, maybe just because of the situation that we are in and because we have to think differently. It may be that, for Northern Ireland, we just have to change our unique selling point, as somebody said to me recently, and maybe market ourselves differently. The word "degrowth" has not been used in the conversation so far, to be honest, but it is early days.

Ms Bailey: OK, thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Before we finish on this question, I will say that involving children and young people is crucial. I know from my work at community level at home, where we manage an area of special scientific interest (ASSI) as part of a community facility, that children's involvement is crucial. It is not only about their future. They can come up with some of the best ideas, provided that they are involved in the consultation process. It is also about trying to reach out to them in a medium that they understand, such as through art or competitions or whatever. Has the Department thought of any novel or other ways to involve children in the development of the strategy, through schools or whatever? Does it have any mediums or creative ideas to involve children in the process?

Ms Teague: I know that, in the environment strategy, the Department used the Lyric and did plays for children. Simon is better placed than me to talk about that. I understand that it was a great success in reaching out. We will take the lessons from that forward into green growth. We have looked at innovative ways of doing that. Simon, was it the Lyric that we used? Can we bring Simon in?

Mr Webb: Yes, Tracey. The Lyric was, I think, on the specific issue of single-use plastics and the environmental policy division's (EPD) work on that. For the strategy itself, we looked at various events with Ulster Wildlife, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and Eco-Schools. Indeed, when we launched the public discussion document, we worked with Ulster Wildlife, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and the Belfast Hills Partnership to do a litter pick in the hills in north Belfast. The Minister attended with the BBC, and large groups of children, pupils and students were involved in clearing up litter there. It was a very successful event, which got pretty good media coverage as well.

Ms Teague: Chair, we will pick up lessons from what others have used in engaging young people.

There is another thing to mention. I do not know whether any of you are tuned into MyNI. Another way of putting out the message is through social media, and we have done some great work through MyNI, particularly during the COVID period, on looking out and watching nature and on litter and so on. All that good information went on during the summer months, such as to protect nature if you are out on a staycation. We have already had discussions about using that social media platform to deliver messages on green growth. We know that young people are more inclined to follow social media.

We will look a bit further, Chair, at the points that nearly every member has raised about making sure that we engage children and young people in this process.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Finally, on a completely unrelated point, the topic of emissions from farming has been raised here on a number of occasions. Will the future environment and green growth strategies recognise that CO₂ emissions as a consequence of farming and food production are part of a cyclical biological process that involves the sequestration of CO₂ back into the environment through the land, which farmers maintain in a way that maximises sequestration as part of that cyclical biological process?

Ms Teague: That is definitely in the arena of the future agricultural policy. We are feeding in through that mechanism to make sure that that is captured in terms of the carbon sequestration. A bit of work is under way on that, certainly with our science colleagues in the Department. It is being factored in.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): I thank the officials for their attendance this morning. It was a good session with a lot of questions and a lot of detailed answers. Thank you very much for that.

Ms Teague: Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you. Take care.