

# COUNCIL FOR NATURE CONSERVATION AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

**128<sup>th</sup> Meeting**  
**Manor Suite, Greenmount College, Antrim on the**  
**29<sup>th</sup> June 2010**

**Present:**

Mr P Casement, Chairman  
Mr P Archdale, Deputy Chairman  
Dr T Bazley  
Mr B Black (Items 1-8)  
Mr M Hill (Items 8-14)  
Mr D Hughes  
Mr J Jackson  
Dr H Kirkpatrick  
Mr R Northridge  
Mr J Simpson (Items 9-14)  
Prof B Smith  
Mr A Upton

**In Attendance:**

Mr G Seymour	NIEA (Items 1-9)
Prof H Platt	NIEA
Mr I Enlander	NIEA (Items 1-9)
Ms B McAlister	Secretariat
Mrs S Neal	Secretariat

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Mr J Anderson, Mr J Campbell, Mr M Campbell, Dr R Horton, Mrs L McCullough and Mr S McGregor.

**2. DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST ISSUES**

Mr James Jackson declared an interest in the proposed ASSI site at Clarehill. Mr Jackson reported that this site may still be owned by a family member.

**3. MINUTES OF THE 127<sup>th</sup> MEETING HELD ON THE 7<sup>th</sup> MAY 2010**

The minutes of the meeting on the 7<sup>th</sup> May were agreed and signed with one amendment. Item 11.1 substitute 'regrettable' for 'unfortunate'.

**4. MATTERS ARISING**

**4.1 Natural Heritage Grant-Aid Programme**

The Chairman reported that the sub group had met to review the proposed paper on the 2010 criteria and comments on behalf of Council were submitted to NIEA.

The Chairman and Deputy Chairman met with the Minister on the 28<sup>th</sup> June and briefly discussed the issues around funding emphasising that NGOs need to work together and stressed that NGOs are delivering on the national responsibilities. Deputy Chairman reported that NIEL have commissioned Envision, a consultancy group to conduct a review of funding of the NGO sector and the need for NGOs to be more joined up and how the work of the NGOs should link into the strategic objectives of NIEA. The Chairman and Deputy Chairman will be attending a meeting next week to review Envision's preliminary results. Deputy Chairman also noted that NIEA are conducting a strategic review of the grant programme and the Envision report will add to the NIEA review.

Mr Seymour reported that the 2010 Grant-Aid programme was open and applications will be assessed in the Autumn and that the Minister was supportive of this area of work.

The Chairman reported that he had responded to UWT letter concerning funding for the management of nature reserves and indicated that the issue was discussed during the last CNCC meeting and had also been raised during CNCC's meeting with the Minister.

#### 4.2 **Planning Service Consultations**

The Chairman reported that PEPG has been renamed PNRD (Planning & Natural Resources Department). The Chairman reported that he took the opportunity to raise CNCC's concerns relating to the lack of communication and information sharing with PNRD during the recent meeting with the Minister. The Chairman noted that the SAC Chairs will be meeting with the NIEA Board and the Permanent Secretary in early August and will follow up on these issues.

**Action Follow up on issues with Permanent Secretary Chairman**

#### 4.3 **PPS 21 Supplementary Planning Guidance – Colin Buchanan Consultation**

The Chairman reported that he will confirm if responses are still being accepted for this consultation and will prepare a response on behalf of CNCC.

**Action Prepare response on Supplementary Guidance to PPS21 Chairman**

#### 4.4 **Marine Bill**

The Chairman reported that a draft response to the Marine Bill consultation is currently being reviewed by members of the Marine and Coastal Working Group. At the Chairman's request and to ensure the CNCC response incorporates any geological issues, Dr Bazley will review the consultation document and draft response and provide input to the Chairman.

Dr Bazley confirmed that exploratory work will be ongoing over the next few years and there will be severe implications from sand and gravel extractions.

Mr Enlander reported that the JNCC Iris pilot project is looking at this.

The Chairman reported that the Marine Bill was one of the issues raised with the Minister and the concerns of where the inter-tidal boundaries ended. Council remains concerned on how the interface between land and sea will be dealt with.

Prof Smith reported that a review is ongoing to modify the boundary line of the Giant's Causeway World Heritage Site and will take into account the need for a boundary extending further out to sea.

**Action Submit final consultation response Chairman/Secretariat**

#### 4.5 **JNCC Nature News Magazine**

The Chairman reported that he will follow up on this action with JNCC.

**Action Discussion recommendations with JNCC Chairman**

#### 4.6 **Designated Areas of ASSIs**

The Chairman reported that the Parkland ASSI meeting was an extremely successful meeting and raised a number of issues as well as some very positive feedback. The objective is to provide a better understanding of designations of parklands and the feedback will be used to develop a model to use in other locations. The final meeting report will be circulated to Council shortly.

**Action Circulate final meeting report Secretariat**

#### 4.7 **AONBs**

Mr Seymour reported that the designation map for the Strangford and Lecale AONB was signed on the 7<sup>th</sup> June and the site formally designated. Mr Seymour stated that there will be a launch event for the newly designated site in the Autumn.

#### 4.8 **CNCC 8<sup>th</sup> Report**

No progress to report on the 8<sup>th</sup> report.

#### 4.9 **Presentation to Mr Francey**

The Chairman reported that a presentation was made to Mr Cyril Francey to thank him for his years of dedicated service to the Councils. The Chairman passed on Cyril's warm thanks and regards to everyone and noted that Cyril thoroughly enjoyed the day and loved his painting. The Chairman thanked the Secretariat for coordinating the farewell lunch and gift.

## 5. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

### 5.1 JNCC Meeting

The Chairman reported on the recent JNCC meeting held on the 17<sup>th</sup> June. The main focus of the meeting was finance as JNCC are looking for ways to make savings.

Mr John Robbs of DEFRA made a presentation on the pending Government cuts due over the next four years with his budget reduced by 30% compared to an average of 25% across Government. The Chairman felt it likely that the natural environment will take more cuts than other departments and noted that Natural England is considering cutting their staff by one third and are dramatically reducing their activities.

Mr Seymour reported that at least there was clarity in the DEFRA presentation and that in Northern Ireland departmental decisions will need to be taken within the NI block, and NIEA are working on the assumption that there will be a 25% reduction in budgets with a lot of uncertainties.

Mr Seymour noted that if Education and Health budgets are ring-fenced other departments will have to surrender more and NIEA will have to identify their priorities.

The Chairman reported that on a more positive note John Robbs' presentation highlighted that the new coalition government have identified biodiversity as a top priority and a White Paper on the Natural Environment is being prepared and should be completed by the end of the year. He noted that the publication of the NEA is seen as instrumental to the white paper and reported that the NI chapter of NEA should be complete by the end of November. In addition to the White Paper, Sir John Lawton's review of protected sites is due to be completed by August. The Chairman commented that while biodiversity may be noted as a top priority there may be no money to progress with activities.

Deputy Chairman reported that an environmental white paper currently exists in Northern Ireland, but is wholly focussed on Better Regulations and that the devolved government will have the opportunity to input into the UK white paper.

The Chairman reported that the Common Agricultural Policy budget is likely to be reduced by 30% with potential cuts to Pillar 2 funding (Rural Development, including agri-environment schemes) which may require match funding nationally.

### 5.2 CNCC Meeting with Minister

The Chairman and Deputy Chairman met with the Minister on 28<sup>th</sup> June and had a fairly positive meeting with good discussions on Marine matters, planning issues and renewable energy as well as funding and role of the SACs. The Minister confirmed that RPA will not go ahead as planned for 2011 but planning reform will move forward with a plan-led system. The Minister was supportive of the SACs having control of their own budget. The meeting also involved a discussion on the exclusion zones in Strangford Lough. CNCC offered strong support to NIEA's position of a single relatively large exclusive zone to include all extant *Modiolus*, pointing out the risks of infraction. The Chairman stated that the Minister plans to discuss this issue with the DARD Minister.

Council members noted that the delay with RPA should provide the Planning Service more time to implement better and renewed legislation.

### 5.3 CNCC Meeting with Planning Service Coleraine

The Chairman reported that he attended a meeting with Ms Mary McIntyre, Planning Service Office, Coleraine. The Chairman asked for Council's endorsement to write to Planning Service on the importance of AONBs particularly with regard to PPS21. Council agreed and a letter will be prepared to Planning Service

**Action Prepare letter to Planning Service**

**Chairman**

#### 5.4 **SACs Meeting with Heritage Council**

The Chairman reported that the SACs met with the Heritage Council in Dublin on 13<sup>th</sup> May to identify opportunities to work together. One key area for the Heritage Council was Landscape with the challenge to find ways to get people to articulate their love of local landscape. This offers a good opportunity to support landscape conservation and to meet commitments to the European Landscape Convention. The Chairman reported that this is a good opportunity for cross-border work and was an interesting proposal. The Heritage Council also met with the Chief Executive of NIEA who is supportive of a cross border project.

#### 5.5 **SACs attendance at Heritage Council Dinner**

The Chairman reported that the SACs attended the Heritage Council dinner on 10<sup>th</sup> June held at the newly completed National Outdoor Centre in Tollymore.

### 6. **NIEA NATURAL HERITAGE STRATEGIC PLAN**

Mr Seymour presented an outline of the NIEA Natural Heritage Vision and Strategic Plan to members of CNCC. This plan will be used to steer and guide the work of the NH Directorate in the long term. It would also be used to see how they could use their resources in the years to come. This plan is intended to super-cede in part the Strategic Plan which was produced for the period 2006 – 2009. CNCC had made a key contribution to that plan.

The Senior Management Team at NIEA produced this draft outline of the Vision and Strategic Plan with clear core objectives. The preparation of the plan has come at a time of unprecedented pressure on budgets. Financial uncertainties make medium and long term planning very difficult but make the need to prioritise all the more important. They have to focus on where savings can be made and identify costs which could be cut. Mr Seymour reported that over the summer the Senior Management Team at NIEA would beef up the draft plan and bring this back to CNCC for debate and discussion at the next CNCC meeting on 5 October. Mr Seymour reported that this is largely an internal document for NIEA and now was a good time to engage with CNCC to receive feedback on vision and outcomes. Council was requested to consider and comment on the Vision and Outcomes which have been drafted for the purpose of producing a Strategic Plan for the Natural Heritage Directorate. This plan will not be formally published but NIEA will share the outcomes of the process with some of their key stakeholders. The Natural Heritage Strategic Plan will also form part of NIEA's overall strategy which is also underway.

Members of Council discussed the following points in relation to the draft plan with Mr Seymour.

1. The importance of education. People need to understand where they live and to value, respect and enjoy their natural heritage. Council felt that the promotion of our natural heritage as well as the education of the public on natural heritage should be given equal importance. The 'Building Stones Map' which had been published by NIEA with other partners and circulated to members of CNCC was felt to be an excellent example of how to educate people in relation to natural heritage.
2. The paramount importance of establishing partnerships with other government departments and agencies. The link between tourism and the natural environment was considered to be a good example. It was felt that page 2 of the draft plan could be beefed up a little bit more.
3. The important contribution that the NGO sector makes to natural heritage – maybe need to show some figures for this.
4. It was felt that the first paragraph of the draft plan could do with a bit of revision but overall the plan had been written extremely well.

5. That some of the bullet points under (a) and (b) were inter-dependant. One cannot consider designation of sites without taking their management into account
6. It was felt that scorecards and targets can put a heavy burden on existing resourcing levels. Resourcing levels actually determine what you can get out of strategic planning. It was felt that the need to secure resources to achieve targets was crucial and Council would like to see this emphasised in the strategic plan.
7. Members of Council discussed with Mr Seymour the importance of using volunteers to achieve objectives at a high level.
8. Members discussed the importance of integrating government policies in order to do things more efficiently.

Mr Seymour stated that education and interpretation was an important element in the better understanding of the natural environment by the public.

Mr Seymour thanked Council for their discussion and comments. Mr Seymour informed members that the draft plan would be brought back to council at the next meeting for further debate and discussion.

Prof Platt stated that in the last 5 or 10 years the focus for nature conservation had changed. This strategic plan enabled NIEA staff to see where their efforts fitted into the long term goals.

Chairman thanked Mr Seymour for his presentation on the plan and hoped that he found the discussion helpful.

#### 7. **NI Strategy Article 11 Surveillance under the Habitats Directive**

Northern Ireland will be expected to make a contribution to defending the UK from potential EC infraction for lack of a systematic and permanent plan for surveillance.

Prof Platt had previously circulated to council the NIEA paper entitled 'A Strategy for Surveillance and Monitoring for European Protected Habitats and Species'. Also circulated were a numbers of Annexes to this paper. This paper outlined the obligation under Article 11 to monitor all habitats and species. There are 52 habitats in Annex 1 of this paper and 46 species in Annexes II, IV and V thought to exist in Northern Ireland and in its territorial waters. These papers and annexes highlight what has to be done for a permanent plan for surveillance.

Prof Platt also tabled a paper at the meeting entitled 'Costing of the Strategy for Surveillance and Monitoring for European Protected Habitats and Species in Northern Ireland'.

The advice in the paper is from the NIEA under Regulations 3 and 6 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 for the protection of habitats and species of Community interest in Northern Ireland. The advice from NIEA is to the Department of Environment Northern Ireland – Planning and Natural Resources Division (PNRD).

Members of Council discussed the paper with Prof Platt and the undernoted points were raised.

Chairman pointed out that according to data in pages 14, 15 and 16 of the paper a series of actions were outlined as requirements in Northern Ireland, but the rationale for the choice of species and habitats was not entirely clear.

Members discussed the area survey work on bats.

Members also discussed with Prof Platt the degree of hybridisation of the Irish Hare with the introduced Brown Hare (not a species of Community Interest).

Members pointed out that lamprey were not currently included in routine fish monitoring. Deputy Chairman suggested that Prof Platt should talk to John McCartney in the Loughs Agency regarding this.

Deputy Chairman stressed the importance of the Northern Ireland Countryside Survey in determining long term trends in habitat change and flagged up the need for continuity of funding for this programme. This was particularly relevant, given the shorter-term monitoring of the Countryside Management Scheme funded by DARD.

Information on range, extent and condition of broad habitats can be obtained from the results of the 2007 NICS, details of which are currently being worked on. It is hoped that Annex I habitats which are more representative of the Northern Ireland countryside will be able to be assessed on a regular basis using NICS methodology, but the 10 year cycle of this research is felt to be too infrequent to meet EU standards.

Chairman suggested that the Strategy for Surveillance and Monitoring for European Protected Habitats and Species in Northern Ireland would require a major effort from NIEA as well as additional resources.

Prof Platt discussed the Statutory Duty of the Wildlife Order in relation to Article 11 with members of council. Prof Platt also discussed the Biodiversity Action Plans with monitoring requirements which have been published for priority habitats and species. Habitats which have been targeted for action plans are woodland, peatlands, freshwater and wetlands, coastal and marine, heathlands and farmlands and grasslands.

Prof Platt reported that there would be strict control of statistics and this would be co-ordinated at national level by JNCC.

The Chairman thanked Prof Platt for presenting his paper to CNCC and looked forward to more progress being made to monitor and protect in line with EC obligation.

## 8. **ASSI PROPOSALS**

Mr Ian Enlander of NIEA presented five new Earth Science ASSI proposals for the Council to endorse.

### **Kilcoan**

The rock exposure at Kilcoan is the type locality for the Island Magee Siltstones Member and the Kilcoan Sands Member of the Hibernian Greensands Formation. In addition, exposure includes the Belfast Marls Member. These are among the oldest rocks of Cretaceous age in Ireland.

### **Creggan**

Mr Enlander apologised to Council for the inclusion of an incorrect map and presented on screen the correct site map and reported the area is 13.17 ha in size.

The site is the type locality for the Creggan Chalk Member of the Ulster White Limestone Formation. The rocks are from the Campanian Stage of the Cretaceous and were originally deposited approximately 80 million years ago. It is illustrative of chalk sedimentation in the Larne-Lough Neagh Basin and allows for comparison with these beds elsewhere within the Basin.

### **Capecastle**

The site contains excellent exposures of the Ulster White Limestone Formation. In particular the influence of the positive Dalradian ridge during chalk sedimentation can be demonstrated.

## **Clarehill**

The sequence at Clarehill Quarry is representative of the attenuated Ulster White Limestone Formation in the Lagan Valley. The site also contains well preserved cylindrical flints known as Paramoudra's from the Ballymagarry Chalk Member.

NIEA reported that there was no evidence of dumping on the site.

In response to Council's inquiry about the development framework of the village and the possible potential for development on the site, NIEA reported that they have routine consultations with Planning Service to review and discuss any proposed planning applications.

## **Carneal**

The site contains rocks demonstrating the interaction between several rock types. An unusual range of minerals were formed by the intrusion of a Palaeogene age dolerite plug into the local Ulster White Limestone.

NIEA reported that when identifying features to include in the citation they aim to strike a balance and conduct internal discussions to identify what the gain may be for inclusive of features.

The Chairman highlighted the historical interest of two of the sites and noted the importance to join up the cultural heritage with biodiversity and geodiversity to support the designation.

NIEA reported that built heritage do not have evidence to support the scheduling of it sites.

Dr Bazley stated that it is important to recognise that geodiversity is a critical factor in our biodiversity. The Ulster White Limestone (Chalk) is especially important to the understanding of the period around 80 million years ago known as the Cretaceous. The Northern Ireland Chalk exposures are the most westerly in Europe and have more than just national significance.

Mr Enlander offered his sincere thanks to Dr Bazley for his valuable contribution to Irish geology through the publication of Earth Science Ireland, reporting that accolades are regularly received from outside Northern Ireland and it is regarded as a standard that others aim to achieve.

The Chairman endorsed this and offered the Council's thanks to Dr Bazley for his contribution.

Council endorsed the five proposals.

The Chairman thanked Mr Enlander for his presentation.

## **9. INTER-TIDAL HARVESTING**

Deputy Chairman presented a paper on inter-tidal harvesting for Council's input. The paper was prepared for NIEA to highlight the impact and issues of this activity which is currently happening on a large scale.

Deputy Chairman reported that Down District Council has granted an environmental health licence to allow the processing of 5 tons of winkles per week in Ardglass.

Prof Platt reported that this is an illegal activity in ASSIs with serious human health issues and is also damaging the reputation of NIEA. Mr Platt suggested the need to regulate this and the need for clear guidance that licences are needed.

Deputy Chairman reported that there is an inter-departmental group, organised and chaired by Kirsten Dunbar of the NI Food Standards Agency, that has looked into the inter-tidal harvesting issue, but has had difficulty taking it forward due to the jurisdictional complexities involved.

The Chairman reported that the disturbance is quite as severe as the actual harvesting since it is being conducted at low tide. The issue of illegal and unlicensed intertidal harvesting will present a test case for the effectiveness of the forthcoming Marine Bill.

Council raised the question on the availability of scientific data on the recovery aspect and sustainability level and the need to show the consequences of this type of activity.

Prof Platt reported that this paper is very timely and will review available information and come back to Council with an update.

Mr Seymour has asked his directorate for their input on the paper and hopes to come back to Council by the October meeting.

The Chairman thanked Deputy Chairman for gathering this information and offered Council's support to NIEA for any future actions.

10. **CNCC WORK PROGRAMME / DIARY**

The list of forthcoming events, pending consultations, and forecast of major work was circulated to members.

The Chairman reported that a number of the refused planning applications on windfarms are now going to the appeals commission and Council are being asked to respond on PAC consultation requests. The Chairman also reported that it was interesting that the windfarm application within Binevenagh AONB was refused on the grounds of incompatibility with the designation.

11. **CNCC WORKING GROUP REPORTS**

Minutes of the Marine & Coastal working group meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> May and minutes from the Eco-system working group meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> June were circulated to members.

Deputy Chairman reported that NIEA presented to the Eco systems working group a draft paper with guidelines of NIEA policy on how they manage peat cutting and will return to Council with an updated paper at a future meeting.

12. **MEMBERS REPORTS**

Members reports were circulated to Council. The Chairman thanked members for their input into the events list and for submitting their reports.

13. **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Council's event list and completed consultation responses were circulated to Council via email.

14. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

14.1 **NIRDP Sub Group**

Deputy Chairman reported that the NIRDP sub group which he chairs has a vacancy and if any member would be interested in joining the group to let him know.

14.2 **LNAC / LBAC**

Mr Simpson reported that he was late for today's Council meeting as he had attended the last meeting of the LNAC/LBAC committees. Mr Simpson reported that it was very sad that the committees were being disbanded due to lack of funding as they have provided an excellent service for 15 years. Mr Simpson stated that over the years, the committees have been instrumental in raising capital for key projects and these projects can no longer be maintained or resurrected. At the meeting a presentation was made to Ms Caroline Marshall for her dedicated years to service to the Committees.

