

**GREENER,
CLEANER,
FAIRER.**

Green Party NI

Local Government Manifesto 2023



Leader's Foreward

The climate and biodiversity crises are the defining challenges of our time. Future generations will judge us on how we respond to these crises today and during the time to come. Their future depends on us showing bravery - taking all necessary interventions and mitigations.

The Green Party NI is striving for a greener, cleaner, fairer Northern Ireland - this manifesto details how we make this happen at local government level.

Twenty-five years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement we have much to do to achieve healthier, happier communities. While the violence of the Troubles has abated, we are a long way off sustainable peace and reconciliation, and we are once again without an Executive while people are suffering through a cost of greed crisis.

The challenges that we face at present are stark and multi-faceted.

The health service that carried us through the pandemic is at the point of collapse. We face a housing crisis due to the repeated failure of Executive parties to deliver affordable and quality housing. A lack of reform and investment means that other public services are creaking or at breaking point.

Northern Ireland stands at risk of becoming the dirty corner of Europe. Our per-capita emissions are the highest of any part of these islands. Every year, over seven million tonnes of raw sewage is dumped into our waterways. Every single one of our rivers, lakes and coastal waters has failed to meet basic quality standards. Northern Ireland's polluted air kills 800 people a year. We are the twelfth worst region in the world for biodiversity loss.

It shouldn't be this way. It doesn't have to be this way.

Northern Ireland can be greener, cleaner and fairer. Local government can help people in their everyday lives and deliver public services that are efficient, sustainable and equitable.

We need greater devolution of powers to local councils to make that happen, starting with regeneration and local transport powers. Bringing powers closer to people will bring better decision making and provide more accountable politics.

But with power comes responsibility and we need Councillors across Northern Ireland with a commitment to greener, cleaner, fairer politics. I am proud of what our Councillors have achieved over the previous mandate, but our work is long-term and it's just the beginning.

That's why we need your help. If you want a greener, cleaner and fairer Northern Ireland then please vote Green Party NI number 1 on the 18 May 2023.

Mal O'Hara
Green Party NI Leader

Introduction

This is a time of transition - emerging from a global pandemic, adjusting to life outside the European Union, facing global climate catastrophe and the devastation of biodiversity on our doorstep. Our communities are dealing with drastic changes to their working lives. A shortage of quality, affordable, sustainable housing, and cost of living increases are leaving many families and individuals struggling to meet basic needs. Funding for the arts is being slashed, local businesses and community organisations are fighting for survival, and our natural resources are in rapid decline. There is no time to wait for parties who are unable or unwilling to find a way to make government work for the people. We deserve politics that brings power back to the people - putting resources and decisions in the hands of the community. We deserve radical, achievable action that makes space for people to work with councils to make our lives better.



We deserve a **greener, cleaner** and **fairer** Northern Ireland.

The Green Party NI stands for the four pillars of grassroots democracy, social justice, ecological protection and nonviolence. We have proved we're willing to push for changes that translate into real improvement in people's lives. Green councillors show up, push back against council funding carve ups, and fight for genuine community involvement in the decisions that affect them. Green councillors ask the hard questions, they hold developers to account, and protect community hubs and green spaces in our cities, towns and villages. When the Greens have power, we make change. When Greens have power we put it back in YOUR hands.

This election, the Green Party NI commits to making a Greener, Cleaner and Fairer Northern Ireland.

We will push for a **greener** Northern Ireland by:

- Protecting our climate, our natural resources and local biodiversity, through Tree Protection Orders and a moratorium on planning permission for new incinerators.
- Securing reliable and affordable energy through community energy plans.

We will fight to **clean up** politics by:

- Making councils work for local communities through pushing for more transparency and more powers in local government.
- Putting communities at the heart of our planning system through mandating community representatives on planning committees.

We will work to **make our institutions fairer** by:

- Keeping Social justice at the heart of our policy actions by pushing councils to address the gaps left by the European Social Fund.
- Changing the narrative on addiction through promoting overdose prevention centres and a Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Policy.



GREENER BY...

Protecting our Climate, natural resources, and biodiversity

The Green Party NI understands that we are facing a climate catastrophe. We must act decisively to end our reliance on fossil fuels, the loss of biodiversity, and consumption beyond the natural limits of our planet. The next four years are crucial to making this happen, and there is a lot that can be done locally to help. Greener, cleaner, and fairer councils means a just transition to sustainable jobs, an economy that works for communities, and for safe, beautiful, and thriving nature from our countryside to our city streets.

Your Green Councillors will:

- Ensure all councils have ambitious net zero climate targets and plans to achieve them, co-designed with the communities most impacted.
- Protect and enhance green spaces to provide amenities and recreation to communities and allow wildlife to thrive.
- Use community gardens as spaces to promote wellbeing and protect nature by supporting everyone to better understand how to promote biodiversity and guard against the threat of invasive species.
- Oppose the large-scale incineration of waste, including a moratorium on granting planning permission for new incinerators. Instead, we will work to ensure that all councils have a zero waste plan in place by 2026, and that local businesses and public services can make a just transition away from single use materials.
- Ensure that councils champion active travel and public transport to reduce car dependency in Northern Ireland, working with partners in Translink and central government to roll out quality infrastructure to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution.
- Ensure council premises are free from single use plastics.
- Invest in biodiversity officers and retraining staff to ensure that all council spaces are managed using practices that support biodiversity and carbon capture, including rewilding land, banning the use of toxic pesticides and herbicides, and increasing the number of native trees on council land.
- Support the Rights of Nature - recognising that we must balance the rights of human beings with the rights of other species, and that seeing nature as more than property means improved conditions for everyone.
- Support local food production through enhancing provision of community gardens, allotments, and grow it yourself schemes.
- Ensure that councils work with landowners, farmers, and partners in central government so that agriculture can thrive using nature-based solutions and sustainable and affordable land management techniques.
- Support the circular economy by promoting repair cafes, clothes swaps, and resource sharing, and providing improved facilities for reusable nappies and period products.

Securing green, affordable, and reliable energy

The Green Party NI recognises the pressure on households, communities and small businesses as a result of the huge increase in the cost of energy. Greener, cleaner, fairer energy means moving away from fossil fuels and energy production that is in the hands of huge multinational corporations. Switching our energy supply to renewable sources presents huge economic and environmental opportunities. It has the potential to reduce the cost of living, as well as delivering significant social and environmental benefits for local communities.

Your Green Councillors will:

- Support a move to reliable, clean, and cheaper energy, to save households money on their bills.
- Support schemes that make domestic retrofits cheaper, more accessible, and more equitable, so that everyone can benefit from clean energy regardless of their tenure, location, or type of home.
- Ensure all councils have ambitious fossil fuel reduction targets and that all council-owned premises should aim to be powered by at least 85% renewable energy by 2027.
- Invest in the most effective energy efficiency programmes to reduce energy waste in all council operated buildings.
- Ensure that communities and environmental considerations are central to decisions around planning applications for renewable energy.
- Work with statutory partners to understand how councils can support more not-for-profit and community-owned renewable energy projects. These would retain financial revenues within the local community and improve the reliability and affordability of energy for households, small businesses, and community groups.
- Reform council procurement to ensure that all council energy is purchased from the most environmentally friendly suppliers possible.
- Move council pension policies away from fossil fuel-based funds and into green technology funds.



CLEAN UP POLITICS BY...

Making councils work for local communities

Since 1998, we have spent 40% of the time without a government at Stormont. This stop/start approach to governance has failed us all, leading to deterioration in health, housing and education driven by failure to reform and invest in these vital services and the people who provide them. It is unsurprising that people feel detached and disillusioned by wider politics. We are seeing a regular cycle of political crises, shiny deals and compromises developed behind closed doors. None of these translate into better financial stability, good health or wellbeing for the population.

In that time, local authorities and councils have remained in place. They have carried on the normal functions of local government while the wider political structures fail. We believe that local councils should have more devolved powers - a move that brings power closer to people. Council agendas should be shaped by the needs and ambitions of residents. We need to amplify the voice of ordinary citizens in community planning, so that decisions around economic, spatial, and social development are driven by the needs of the public, not by the interests of a small minority of elites.

Your Green Councillors will:

- Push for Local Development Plans to be co-designed with communities, assigning statutory weight to community priorities in local planning decisions, and better aligning local development planning with community planning so that your area can be proactively shaped by the people who live there.
- Drive forward the development of a public participation strategy that will bring a more diverse array of voices into council decision making by removing barriers to participation and retraining staff to engage more effectively with diverse communities.
- Promote active citizenship through investing in community-led initiatives.
- Ensure that councils use their purchasing power to put money back in the hands of local providers and build community wealth.
- Introduce participatory budgeting, so local residents have a direct say in council spending.
- Support the introduction of new reforms to devolve more strategic powers to local government, including regeneration powers so that our cities and towns can develop more quickly to respond to the needs of local communities.
- Ensure improved transparency and accountability by making agendas, minutes, and the attendance and voting records of councillors on council committees publicly available.
- Reduce the use of restricted and redacted items on committee meetings and agendas.
- Make it easier for people to find out what your council does, including webcasting committee meetings as standard and making it easier for members of the public to scrutinise decision making.

Putting communities at the heart of our planning system

Councils have the potential to transform our places into greener, cleaner and fairer communities through effective use of planning powers. The Green Party wants to use those powers to tackle inequality, help create vibrant neighbourhoods, make space for the arts and culture, improve and protect our natural environment, preserve built heritage and address the housing crisis.

We want a planning system that puts people first, and in which members of the public enjoy the same rights as developers. We want our towns and cities to be shaped by community need, not private profit. We want to see an end to dereliction and vacancies on high streets across NI, and use council powers to tackle greedy developers who leave land unused while community needs go unmet.

Your Green Councillors will:

- Enhance the protection of trees through review of the Tree Protection Orders process.
- Publish minutes of meetings between council officials and developers in relation to any proposed development or major planning application.
- Introduce a requirement that community representatives are involved in pre-application discussions to ensure early, proactive community input into plans.
- Improve how Developer Contributions are implemented and overseen. Make the process more transparent to support wider community benefit in areas where significant development is taking place.
- Push for planning decisions that consider the housing and social needs of communities over developers.
- Oppose the high densification of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in a single area. Ensure that HMO landlords are held to account for the safety and welfare of tenants and the impact of their property and its tenants on the surrounding environment.
- Support the introduction of third-party rights of planning appeal to balance the rights of communities with those of developers.
- Tackle homelessness by supporting essential crisis services, planning for and promoting affordable public housing while rejecting austerity measures such as the bedroom tax.
- Support the introduction of rent controls and legislative reform to strengthen tenants' rights.
- Support the introduction of penalties to encourage developers and landowners to redevelop and protect buildings from falling into dereliction.
- Ensure that councils work constructively with Housing Associations and use this relationship to support more affordable housing in the places where it is needed most.
- Continue to support scrapping the rates cap to ensure that NI's wealthiest households pay their fair share towards public services.
- Oppose planning or landscaping measures in public spaces, such as the removal of benches, window ledge spikes or other hostile infrastructure, designed to deter sleeping or resting in these spaces.
- Require all new builds to meet the highest environmental standards, minimising carbon emissions and increasing energy efficiency.
- Integrate a sustainable construction strategy as a condition of all planning applications. This covers recycling and reuse of materials, reduction of waste materials, energy generation, energy conservation, landscaping and sustainable transport facilities.



FAIRER BY...

Centring social justice

Social Justice is one of the four pillars of the Green movement, and we have a proven track record of leading the way on positive social change. To deliver power back to the people, we must continue to push local councils to go further than tickbox equality exercises and outdated ideas of Good Relations for 'two communities'. We recognise the many identities and perspectives we hold as members of our shared society, and that equity and fairness belong at the heart of economic and environmental policies. When we fight for social justice, we commit to fighting for the perspectives and needs of people across social classes, genders, disabilities and neurodivergence, ethnicities, religious and national identities in all that we do, not just when we're talking about inclusion and diversity. We know that justice is not just an ideal – it must translate into actual improvements in people's lives.

Your Green Councillors will:


- Make every council a Living Wage employer and through a new progressive procurement policy ensure that all suppliers are also Living Wage employers.
- Ensure every council has an ambitious social value in procurement policy.
- Fight to address the gaps left by the European Social Fund and other cuts to the community and voluntary sector and work with communities to find sustainable solutions so they can continue their work.
- Push for councils to adopt wellbeing economy indicators on health, nature, education and communities rather than just foreign direct investment and economic growth.
- Support trade unions in ensuring council workers receive fair pay and conditions.
- Centre the voices of young people, disabled people, migrants, people of minoritised ethnicities, queer people, neurodiverse people, and members of the Traveller community in the decisions that affect them. We will work to improve elected representation from these groups.
- Push back against conditions which produce socioeconomic harm and contribute to poor mental health, suicide and addiction, such as intergenerational trauma and a stagnating post-conflict transition resulting in many people being 'left behind'.
- Advocate for communities, fighting so their needs and aspirations are reflected in the policies and funding that impacts everyday lives.
- Commit to pushing for increased accessibility for disabled and neurodiverse people across all areas of local government policy.
- Standardise the use of accessible presentations and online content, including closed captioning on recordings and alt text description on images.
- Push for anti-racist approaches to good relations and normalise inclusive language and actions. We support a change to monitoring and reporting to help move beyond the idea of two single-identity communities.
- Push for free access to English Language Classes.
- Seek to invest in quality and accessible interpreting services, including British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language interpreters.

- Fight for increased use of community budgeting, gender budgeting, and other methods of transferring decision-making power and resources to local communities.
- Develop meaningful strategies to address transphobic, homophobic, biphobic, xenophobic and race hate crime in our cities, towns and villages.
- Support LGBT awareness week and safe places for LGBT people.
- Stand against the hostile environment for migrants, pushing back against creeping immigration control tasks being forced on local government officials.
- Councillors will support executive initiatives to 'end the harm' in communities impacted by paramilitaries, and support constituents vulnerable to paramilitary coercion and control.

Changing the narrative on addiction

Since 2018, more than 800 people have died from drug overdoses in Northern Ireland, and drug deaths are at an all-time high. We recognise that the evidence shows a public health approach to drug dependence leads to better outcomes for people and society as a whole. Though decriminalisation of drugs is a matter reserved for Westminster, we have fought to lead the way in Belfast City Council by tabling the successful motion to set up an overdose prevention centre to prevent overdose deaths. We believe in honest communication with the public about drugs, and the recognition that most harmful drug use is underpinned by poverty, isolation, mental and physical illness and trauma. Because of this, we support an approach to drug policy which focuses on harm reduction and addressing wider social problems, and we will continue to push for ways to address this at local authority level in the absence of an Executive.

Your Green Councillors will:

- Push for overdose prevention centres across local authorities which are affected by overdose deaths.
 - Lobby Health Trusts and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Departments of Health and Justice and the Attorney General to make the case for special dispensation to set up an overdose prevention centre in Belfast in the absence of an Executive.
 - Continue to work with frontline service workers, council staff, and local media to ensure that the message around addiction and drug dependency is informed by the overwhelming evidence and aligned with a public health approach.
 - Explore the use of citizens' assemblies and other forms of deliberative public engagement to bring the public with us in a more compassionate approach to helping people with substance dependencies.
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