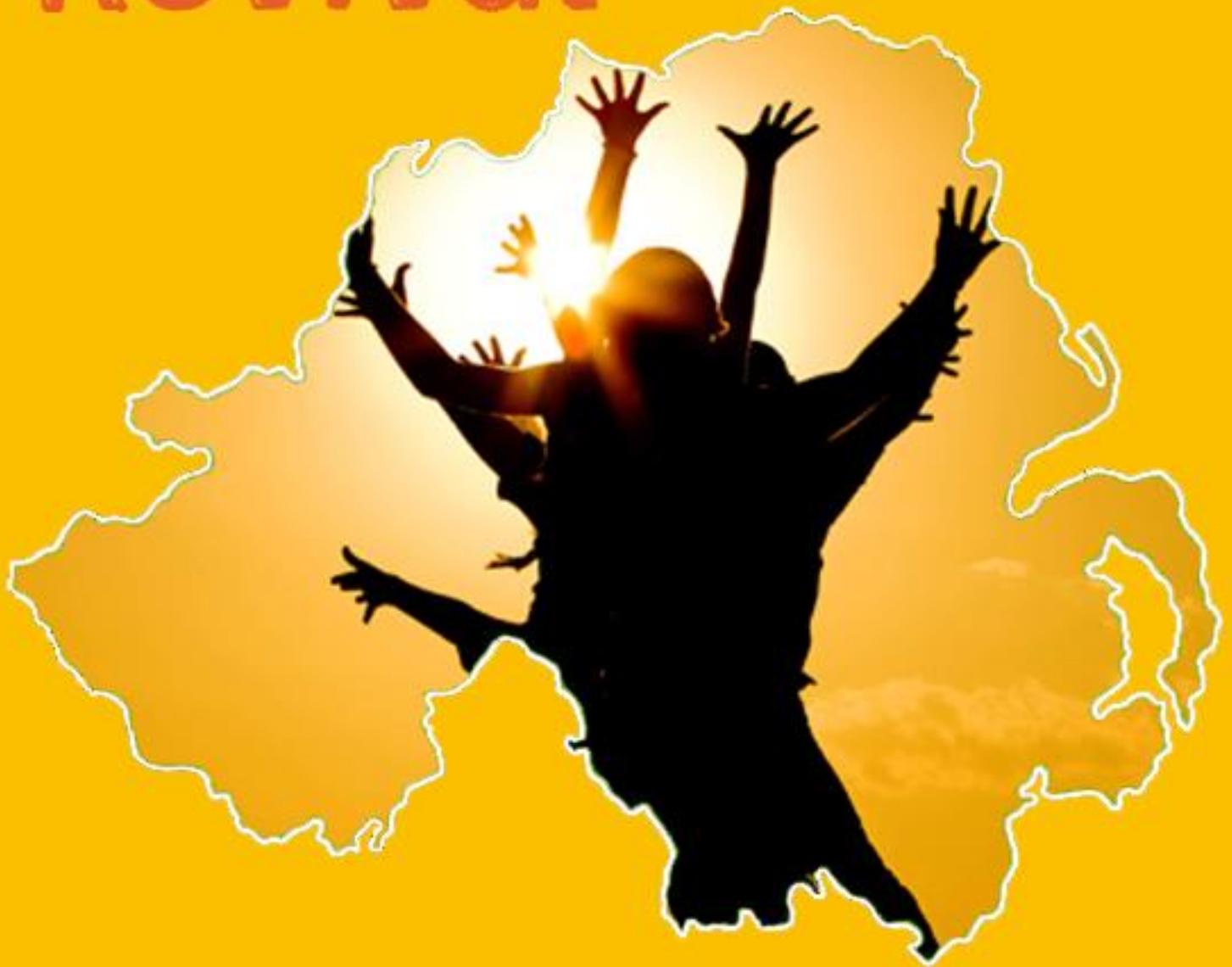


March 2017
Assembly Election Manifesto



**friends of
the earth**
northern ireland

Revival



10 requirements for
a sustainable Northern Ireland

Revival: A manifesto for the 2017 Assembly Election.

Friends of the Earth is calling for a revival. Nothing short of a revival in our political culture will deliver a sustainable, safe and healthy future.

We call for a revival that is rooted in compassion, a sense of belonging, and a new political culture based on ambition, fairness, and the common good. Our new story of progress can be summed up in just three words: *living well together*.

The world and where we live is in transition. We can decide to put to rest the old story of an extractive political culture; the fear; the corrosive sectarianism, and the negativity. Overlaid by failed economics this old story has given us some of the worst water quality and ecosystems, and some of the biggest illegal dumps, factory farms, and quarries in Europe.

We have a new story to tell. Green tourism, local economic development, a reawakened food culture, the credit union movement, the growth in cycling. Emerging nature protectors and those in the creative economy are showing there is another way. We want a society, not just an economy where nature, people, and a sense of belonging and community can flourish.

We can do better than have another lost decade. Our list of ten requirements is a platform for revival. A revival of democracy of politics and of our cultural and ethical values. If we listen carefully, this revival has already started. We demand of the new Programme for Government a new story of who we are and what do we want to be.

1. Responsible: Climate Change Act

Climate change is the single greatest threat facing us, not just in Northern Ireland, but across the globe. The science is very clear: without immediate and ambitious efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we are facing a bleak future. The UK has signed up to the Paris Accord, agreeing to keep the global average temperature rise below 1.5°C. Northern Ireland must do its fair share in meeting the emissions reductions targets needed to stay below 1.5°C.

A Northern Ireland Climate Change Act, with legally binding greenhouse gas reduction targets, would set the framework within which emissions reductions can be brought about in a controlled way. This law will set the framework for a new low carbon economy. Given the scale and urgency of the issue the targets must be ambitious – around an 80% cut on 1990 figures by 2030, and a 90-95% cut by 2050. As one of the world's largest per capita emitters, we have a moral duty to act decisively.

2. Renewable: Fossil Free Northern Ireland

Global energy policy is moving away from fossil fuels. If Northern Ireland is to remain a stable, resilient, and sustainable economy, it must also make the transition to a low-carbon economy. To this end, there should be a total ban on the commercial extraction of all fossil fuels in Northern Ireland. There should be no new major fossil fuel infrastructure, including gas storage and major pipelines, the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, and the Strategic Energy Framework 2010 should be amended to remove the statutory duty to promote natural gas, and the public sector should divest entirely from fossil fuels.

Such measures will demonstrate that Northern Ireland is serious about making the necessary shift to an economy that will be resilient enough to function in a carbon constrained future.

3. Rewild: We want our Nature back

We live in one of the most ecologically depleted parts of the planet. On average European countries have 36% of their land in trees, but where are the trees in Northern Ireland? Less than 0.1% of our landscape is ancient woodland. The Curlew is on the brink of extinction as a breeding species, and we vandalise what remains of our most precious habitats. Our water quality is a disgrace, and the body that provides our drinking water is also a serial polluter. We call for a rewilding strategy to put nature back into our towns, cities, mountains, and countryside with ambitious targets for the restoration of nature.

Lough Neagh is our biggest shared space, and bigger than Malta. This should be the jewel in our crown yet the bird and fish populations are in serious decline and the Lough is at breaking point. We propose that Lough Neagh and Lough Beg should be designated our first Peace Park – restored to an abundance of wildlife with greenways to and from our major urban centres, and managed sustainably in the long term for both nature, fishing, and as a recreational playground for locals and tourists.

4. Resurrect: A Green New Deal

A proposal for a Green New Deal gained cross-party support in the early-2010s. The proposal was a simple one: investing in an ambitious programme to cut consumption of fossil fuels could create thousands of new jobs; help secure our energy supply; and build a competitive low-carbon economy.

Given the urgent need to move to a low-carbon economy, the Green New Deal is as relevant and vital as it ever was. A mass programme of energy efficiency would create jobs and tackle fuel poverty. Imagine the jobs that will be created if all our homes are well insulated and we produce most of energy from clean and green local sources.

5. Revitalise: Third Party Rights of Appeal

The right to participate in the planning system is vital to democracy. This should include the right to challenge a decision to approve development. Currently the only right of appeal in our system lies with the applicant if they have been refused. Developers have two chances to get the outcome they desire, whereas objectors only have one. Third-party Rights of Appeal were voted for by a majority of MLAs in 2011, but the DUP used its veto in the Assembly. The people want the right to challenge poor planning decisions, and we demand that the next Assembly grants them this.

6. Realign: People centred transport

Belfast is one of the ten most congested cities in the UK. We drive too much, and we need to boost people's use of active and public transport. We can't do this when roads are our top priority. Solving all future transport problems means putting new road building last in our list of options.

We need to get people out of their cars before they get anywhere near the centres of our towns and cities, with more public spending on active and public transport, and new ways to put the social and environmental costs of congestion back onto the motorist.

For major infrastructure, we believe that a coastal greenway along the whole of the Northern Irish coast with spurs inland towards Lough Neagh could revitalise Northern Ireland's economy, coupled with a programme to restore our railways.

7. Regulate: Independent Environmental Protection Agency

It is ten years since the Foundations for the Future report set out a vision for looking after our environment. It was either rejected or not given sufficient support by many of the main parties in the Executive.

Since then the impact of crime on the environment has stacked up to the point where regulation is often absent, unauthorised quarries are commonplace and illegal dumping is institutionalised. No one in government is standing up to protect the environment.

The European Commission is currently looking at a major complaint arising from Northern Ireland's failure to look after its environment.

We need an independent and powerful environmental regulator now, with responsibility for both the terrestrial and marine environments.

8. Rebalance: Going for Growth

The Going for Growth strategy undermines Northern Ireland's farming culture with the persistent encouragement of factory farming. Combined with poor planning, and the cumulative impact of pollution, the destruction of our rural landscape will soon be irreversible. This domination of our food system creates problems for the future food security for Northern Ireland, and its deeply flawed analysis of the solutions needed to address climate change clearly highlights the need for the strategy to be scrapped.

We need a strategy to put the brakes on the rapid growth of factory farms, and refocus on agri-ecology. It needs to focus on protecting and encouraging small family farms by giving them leadership in our economy. It needs to encourage and support a fair local food system to be in place with a strong emphasis on sustainable agriculture.

9. Reimagine: Environmental Court

Under the UN's Aarhus Convention, people have the right to environmental Justice and to challenge government decisions. The only legal redress to challenge environmental decisions is through Judicial Review. Judicial Review is expensive, complex, and slow. There is limited environmental law experience nor the political will to comply with rule of environmental law. This access route is narrow and intimidating for lay people to challenge unlawful decisions.

An environmental court would provide an experienced judiciary that can follow both complex laws as well as ecological processes. An environmental court would be a gateway to help access to environmental justice. The environmental court would be independent from agencies, accessible, and positive about challenging bad decision making.

10. Reveal: Transparency in donations

It is a shame that Northern Ireland is going into yet another election under the shadow of donor secrecy. This must be the last time that we are asked to choose our elected representatives whilst being unable to see who is paying their campaign bills.

We cannot have an environmental revival without a democratic revival, and transparency is a crucial component of a healthy democracy. We have been campaigning for parity with the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland for half a decade, and recent events have further proven that we must find out 'who pulls the strings'.

For more than 40 years we've seen that the well-being of people and planet go hand in hand - and it's been the inspiration for our campaigns. Together with thousands of people like you we've secured safer food and water, defended wildlife and natural habitats, championed the move to clean energy and acted to keep our climate stable. Be a Friend of the Earth - see things differently.

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