Our Green and Pleasant Land

Pre-Consultation Paper

Introduction

The Democratic Unionist Party is preparing a new policy paper on the theme of the environment. The scope of the paper will be comprehensive with the aim of a full policy statement relevant to the national Parliament, a restored Assembly and local Councils.

The Consultation Process

A three-stage consultation process is envisaged:

- Pre-consultation paper – This paper will set out the planned scope of the full public consultation document. It will detail the issues that the DUP has identified for the full policy paper to examine. Engagement and responses will be sought on these issues.

- Full consultation paper – This will propose policy ideas and options to address the identified issues and those highlighted in the pre-consultation process.

- Final policy document – following the second consultation on the full document a final policy paper will be adopted that will inform future DUP manifestos.

This process will involve external and internal engagement that will run concurrently. Nothing contained within the Pre-consultation nor Full consultation paper constitute DUP party policy. It is only at the final stage will an idea or an option become party policy.

Over-arching approach

The core aims of the policy will be to ensure that:

- That we can all live in a healthy, greener and pleasant place, region, country and world.
- That we can grow and develop economically while passing on an environment as good if not better than our generation received it.
- That we gain economic advantage by seeking to be in the forefront of technical innovation to achieve environmental goals that are common across the world.

The underlying philosophy is that the perfect should not be the enemy of the good and that environmental progress has too often been held back by seeking perfection and as a low tax party a sceptical approach to taxes.

Four themes

It is envisaged that the full consultation paper will be built around four themes. The nature of the topic that issues and answers will be cross-cutting.

Theme 1 - Global Environment policy and the UK’s role

The aim should be the United Kingdom plays a leadership and practical role in advancing environmental interests. This has been pursued primarily through two policy approaches
(a) **Leading by positive example** e.g. Clean Air Act.

(b) **Commitment to development and implementation of global agreements** e.g. Paris Accords.

However, the policy paper will examine the opportunity to look at two further areas:

(c) **Multi-lateral government action** – sometimes waiting for all the world to agree is not path that will deliver results and in a number of areas environmental problems to not apply to all countries therefore multi-lateral action is the more appropriate tool. No one nation can take the lead on all issues therefore the UK should choose and seek to be the leader on one or small number of environmental issues e.g. deforestation.

(d) **Foreign Aid and the Environment** – The DUP has supported the UK’s adoption of the 0.7% GNI and it is another example of UK positive leadership by example (in 2017 the UK was 1 of only 6 countries which met that United Nations (UN) target). Foreign Aid should be a contributor to global economic growth, political stability and promote security. However, the UK programme does not sufficiently prioritise environmentalism within it. Its approach to spending has two flaws. First, revisions to GNI figures have required significant amounts spent quickly which is usually a recipe for waste. Second, the fitting spend to match the required timeframes for the target has led to ‘book movements’ to achieve the target (e.g. donations given to large global organisations’ to meet in year spending levels). Alternative approaches to this could result in clearer and longer-term successes.

**Theme 2 – Environmental protection**

Under this theme will be a number of existing and emerging issues that need to be addressed:

(a) **Air Pollution** – There have been a number of emerging and developing issues around the air that we breath. In pursuit of CO2 reductions, the growth of diesel has been now found to have contributed to gases and materials in our air that are hazardous to human health. The full policy paper will examine what action is needed to improve air quality and where different levels of government can act proportionately.

(b) **Water pollution** – Northern Ireland has a growing population as does the United Kingdom. Therefore, we need to pursue a policy of adequate safe water resources (including for scenarios with unusual weather patterns). This will need necessary water infrastructure and protection of our water resources from pollution.

(c) **Future Development** – Northern Ireland’s Councils are presently preparing their Local Development Plans which will shape development in each area for decades. These plans so far are based on continuing with present patterns and forms of development. These present forms and patterns need to be assessed and consideration given to what may need to change in the longer-term to ensure healthy and pleasant places to live as well as our land use policy and priorities.

(d) **Oversight** – The achievement of environmental goals is achieved by government by necessary legislation with appropriate oversight and enforcement while individuals contribute through their life choices and the private sector through good business practices. Thus, the existing legislative and oversight will be examined and options considered.

**Theme 3 – Decarbonisation of the economy**

The United Kingdom is legally committed to the ‘decarbonisation’ of the economy. The 2050 target was recently raised from 80% to 100%. The degree of change involved in attempting let alone achieving that target both in terms of technological innovation and cost should not be under-
estimated with fundamental questions to be asked and answered about how we support innovation and who bears the costs and how.

a) **Energy and heat generation** - In seeking to achieve such an aim we must do so while maintaining a fundamental commitment to cheap and secure energy and heat. The technological solutions we will require to see deep and lasting cuts of CO2 are not in sufficiently developed form or in existence. This means we must accept there will be a bridging period involving technologies with lesser carbon emissions. This will involve an examination of past and present approaches to energy generation with an examination of the present and proposed energy mix and assess the roles (if any) of coal, gas, nuclear, wind, solar, hydro-electric, geothermal, tidal, hydrogen and energy from waste as well as the potential contribution of interconnection, carbon capture and macro v micro generation. In all this there needs to be transparency in costs, that government interventions and levies should be for their policy goals not income generation and that the result of policies is to transform energy intensive industries not compel them to countries with cheaper energy and poorer environmental controls.

b) **Energy efficiency** – Energy and heat wasted means a cost to the householder and ultimately pollution to our environment that shouldn’t have been needed. The paper will review the impact of the range of government policies to promote and secure energy efficiency. Equally, we need to consider what regulations are placed on new buildings to assist in the achievement of future energy and environmental goals.

c) **Transport** – Changes in this area will impact directly and indirectly on CO2 targets, air pollution and water pollution. The immediate challenge is to reverse the dependency on diesel (while acknowledging the growth of diesel was a past government policy). The broad goals will be to shift transport from fossil fuel to electrically powered or fuel celled transport with the implications for energy supply as well as encouraging shifts to public transport and cycling and walking (which work best with greater population densities). There are also significant matters to be considered in the area of air travel with punitive and failing environmental taxes.

d) **Circular Economy** – The waste we produce and what we do with it has an environmental impact now and in the future. Our solution has been to bury the problem of waste or export it to areas with laxer standards or enforcement creating environmental damage e.g. plastic pollution in the sea. Landfill has been made an ever more expensive option and countries are closing their doors to our waste. In Northern Ireland there is no uniformity of recycling across councils, not as much recycled as is elsewhere and the methods of collection do not maximise ‘clean’ collection that increase recycling rates and the revenue potentials. This has job creation potential. Energy from Waste (EfW) has so far not yet been achieved in Northern Ireland despite being a standard approach elsewhere and in countries with high environmental standards e.g. Scandinavia (though a private EfW may start contributing shortly to local energy supply).

Theme 4 - Biodiversity and Habitat

The paper will highlight the growing problems with soil quality, decline of pollinators, the relationship between bio-diversity and productivity and protection of coastal seas. It will also seek to build on the work commenced on coastal areas by past DUP ministers and in much broader terms how the protection of the Atlantic Ocean can be advanced. This is an area that all those with green space can contribute too, the role of reforestation and what technological innovation can
contribute. This is underpinned by a belief that Northern Ireland well suited as a test bed for new approaches in the United Kingdom

Other policy papers relevant to this work

This year the DUP will be developing a policy paper on future agricultural support policy therefore, the environmental paper will not go into significantly into this policy area. Past agricultural support has included environmental goals and the paper will restrict itself to potential environmental goals as well as the new opportunities for new forms of agricultural to reduce food miles. The paper also produced a paper for the future of the fishing industry post-Brexit with a number of relevant elements.

Consultation questions

Over-arching approach

- What is your view of the three core aims of the policy?
- What is your view of the underlying philosophy to the assessment and adoption of new policies?

Four themes

- Are the four themes sufficiently comprehensive?
- What additional themes would you suggest?
- Are there specific proposals you wish to submit under any of the themes for our consideration?

Global Environment

- Do you agree with the four sub-themes?
- What additional sub-themes would you suggest should be taken into consideration?
- Are there specific proposals you wish to submit under any of the themes for our consideration?

Environmental Protection

- Do you agree with the four sub-themes?
- What additional sub-themes would you suggest should be taken into consideration?
- Are there specific proposals you wish to submit under any of the themes for our consideration?

Decarbonisation

- Do you agree with the four sub-themes?
- What additional themes would you suggest should be taken into consideration?
- Are there specific proposals you wish to submit under any of the themes for our consideration?

Bio-diversity and Habitat

- Do you agree with the issues identified?
- What additional issues would you suggest should be taken into consideration?
- Are there specific proposals you wish to submit under any of the themes for our consideration?