

Step up the progress

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful
2023 Local Government Manifesto



**KEEP
NORTHERN
IRELAND
BEAUTIFUL**

The voters of Northern Ireland are heading to the polls once again to elect our local councillors to serve us for the next four years.



Dr. Ian Humphreys

CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
KEEP NORTHERN IRELAND BEAUTIFUL

Councils play such an important and sometimes undervalued role in our environment and the response to the climate emergency.

In the work that Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful does we have been fortunate to work with some excellent local representatives and council officers to make a real difference in many communities throughout Northern Ireland.

Council support, along with others, has played a critical role in helping us develop our Live Here Love Here campaign, our Eco-Schools programme and our environmental standards such as Green Flag, Blue Flag and Seaside Awards.

This support helps us establish important benchmarks, for example, highlighting our litter problems and helps us support communities in changing behaviours.

Since 2019, we have made some important progress within local government.

Councils have signed the plastic promise and embarked upon many environmentally friendly initiatives, helping tackle waste and pollution, supporting biodiversity recovery and progressing climate action.

Now we are in 2023, we need to step up this progress and go further faster over the next four years.

Supporting our environment helps build better communities and improves the local economy. The two go together; they are not mutually exclusive.

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful's plan is built upon six simple steps you can follow as a local councillor to make a difference.

With ambition, we can go far; let us make sure we all move together.

Improving Environmental Standards

Street cleansing costs ratepayers more than £31 million a year. The public cares deeply about tackling litter and dog fouling across Northern Ireland. Councils can take the lead in adopting new policies and developing new tools to tackle these issues through a mix of education, behaviour change initiatives, community capacity building and enforcement of penalties.

Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful believes that we can turn the litter tide in the right direction with the right policies.



Local councils should:

- 1 **Focus on litter prevention** Adopt the £200 litter fine launched at the end of 2022. This should be enforced and publicised widely, as a deterrent for those who litter or do not pick up after their dog.
- 2 **Limit access to commonly littered items** Continue with policies to change littering behaviour, consumption habits and waste throughout the council's sphere of influence – staff, premises, policies – and embrace a culture of efficiency and cost savings.
- 3 **Work together for simplicity in messaging** Develop a joined-up approach to enforcement. We need fair and easy-to-understand approaches regarding fixed penalties that can be used across Northern Ireland.
- 4 **Encourage people to use less stuff** Prioritise a waste reduction message in order to tackle the throwaway culture that is building within Northern Ireland. Waste collection is a costly service for councils and ratepayers to provide for. So educating the public about waste reduction is an important measure to reduce overall waste and cost, at a time when poverty is rife.
- 5 **Share ideas with each other** Agree to take part in a consultative forum with other councils so that good ideas can spread across Northern Ireland and policies can be developed jointly. There is no need to reinvent the wheel!
- 6 **Help nature recovery (and our health too)** Support programmes such as Green Flag for parks and encourage people to look after our green spaces. This benefits all of us, with places to exercise, cleaner air and tranquil spaces to relax in.
- 7 **Keep it local** Encourage keeping our recycling waste within Northern Ireland instead of shipping it overseas. This will help develop our circular economy and create local jobs.

Community Engagement

The evidence is clear about the need for all levels of government to act on the climate emergency and loss of nature. We also need to bring the public along with us in this move towards more sustainable and environmentally friendly choices. The Live Here Love Here campaign promotes the values of looking after your local community and bringing people together. We have developed this further since 2019, but more can be done.

Local councils should:

- 1 **Continue investing in Live Here Love Here** Commit to lifting the proportion of their annual budgets invested in behaviour change through the Live Here Love Here media campaign and Small Grants programme. Presently, just a small amount of annual budgets is directed at this goal!
- 2 **Help people help nature and help themselves** Support environmental improvement projects such as food growing initiatives and biodiversity recovery programmes through permissions for community-led development of pockets of council lands.
- 3 **Support job creation in the circular economy** Commit to pilot schemes that can support businesses experimenting with preloved clothes and textiles.
- 4 **Influence others, leading by example** Continue the process of making council buildings plastic free and eliminating their use from functions. And over the next four years escalate the environmental conditions and criteria applied to all procurement exercises.



**LIVE
HERE
LOVE
HERE**



Environmental Education

Environmental Education is identified by bodies such as United Nations as a critical part of fighting the climate emergency and loss of nature. Educating the next generation about what they can do to help our environment is an obligation for all of us. The Eco-Schools programme has been doing this in Northern Ireland since 1994 and we want to see more schools achieve Green Flag status with your help.

1

Local councils should:

Use their civic leadership roles to celebrate international Green Flag Eco-Schools. We would encourage local councils to support the annual local Green Flag award ceremonies and give civic recognition to schools going the extra mile for the environment.

2

Encourage Carbon Literacy training. Councils combined employ thousands of people across their various departments who work with many stakeholders. Having staff trained in environmental awareness will inform and develop their own work and decision making.

3

Continue supporting the Eco-Schools programme with further engagement in the various awards and campaigns that are ongoing across the council areas. Relevant officers can help with this by taking part in Eco-Schools training. We are aiming for half of all our schools to have Green Flag status by 2025. Therein lies a challenge for all of us, to help them get there.



Six Simple Steps

The years ahead may be uncertain for our economy, but the evidence is clear that we need to act to protect our environment if we want to help protect the economy and society itself. Delaying action is not an option. We have made real progress since 2019 and we now need to step it up. At Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, we believe that collaboration and engagement can move us all forward. Sometimes it is easy to feel that this challenge is so daunting that we can do nothing to help. However, that is not the case. We can all do something and even the simplest actions can achieve big results.

Here are six simple steps that we could ask every council candidate to endorse and act upon in the next council mandate.

- 1 **Take part in Carbon Literacy Training- it is important for representatives to understand the scale of the problem and the role they can play in delivering real solutions in their communities.**
- 2 **Invest resources in developing a circular economy to reduce waste and save resources.**
- 3 **Increase resources for behaviour change campaigns. Preventing acts like littering is better than trying to clean up.**
- 4 **Commit to the full elimination of Single Use Plastics during the next council mandate.**
- 5 **Focus on making town centres friendlier to pedestrians and public transport.**
- 6 **Commit to ensuring more council collaboration in areas such as fines and waste reduction.**





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