



Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy 2021-2040

RTPI Response to DAERA,
September 2021

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The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) published a consultation on the draft Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy 2021-2040. The consultation can be viewed at: https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/daera/northern-ireland-peatland-strategy-2021-2040/consult_view/

RTPI NI welcomes the strategy, which provides a focus on the positive management of this important resource in Northern Ireland.

Vision of the Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy 2021-2040

RTPI NI supports the Strategy's Vision.

Whilst the vision is supported, the section "where possible, prioritised for restoration" should be strengthened. Whilst we accept not all areas can be restored for a variety of reasons, the inclusion of "where possible" does weaken the vision and could be used to avoid restoration.

Aim of the Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy 2021-2040

RTPI NI supports the aim of the Strategy, however as with the Vision, the inclusion of "where possible" does undermine the aim and could be used to avoid proactive restoration and management. We welcome the understanding of the need to acknowledge and appreciate the ecosystem services they provide.

Strategic Objective 1 Conserve peatlands & prevent degradation

Target: By 2040, all peatlands supporting semi-natural vegetation are being managed for their peatland biodiversity and ecosystem function.

The actions (9) refer to the need to ensure that current and future legislation and policies are in place for peatland protection and recovery. This is an important point and there is a need for coherence across all government policy. Whilst it is acknowledged that the list is not exhaustive, there should be recognition of the role of the SPPS (Strategic Planning Policy Statement), as this is where Local Development Plans must conform, and so has a lead role in developing planning policy and taking planning decisions. We would also refer to the strong recognition in the SPPS of the related integrated flood management approach.

Strategic Objective 2 Restoration of degraded areas to functioning peatland ecosystems (designated & non-designated sites)

Target: By 2030, degraded peatland habitats are prioritised for restoration to favourable conservation status. By 2040, all high priority degraded peatlands will be under restoration management.

Given the importance of peatlands in mitigation and resilience related to climate change, the timescales within the Objective should be shortened; this is linked to the need for understanding of the ecosystem services provided and their wider benefit to communities.



We welcome action 13 to review existing planning approvals to ensure conditions are discharged correctly. However, it will be essential to ensure there is sufficient budget and officer expertise to fulfil this action. A lack of appropriate of both Council planning departments and the DfI, means this action may not be achievable, without an increase in resources.

Strategic Objective 3 Supporting Sustainable Peatland Management

Target: By 2040 – High Priority degraded peatlands in Northern Ireland are under sustainable management.

RTPI NI supports this Objective and made no further comments.

Strategic Objective 4 Knowledge Sharing & Research

Target: By 2025, stakeholders understand the need for peatland conservation and restoration and have the capacity to deliver the Strategic Objectives and Actions contained within the Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy.

This is an important Objective and is supported by RTPI NI. However, there should be a commencement timescale of a much shorter time period to avoid the risk of this action lacking priority. We would also recommend an action to promote understanding of the detail across the planning profession - for those working in Councils and DfI and also for those who promote development.

Strategic Objective 5 Communication, Education & Access

Target: Peatlands are recognised for their unique biodiversity and ecosystem services provision.

Education on the benefits of peatlands and the ecoservice systems to business and developers - even to those located away from the peatlands themselves - is also essential.

Strategic Objective 6 Governance, Implementation & Funding

Target: The necessary structures are in place to deliver on the Strategic Objectives and Actions contained within the Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy.

RTPI NI supports this Objective and made no further comments.

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Concluding Comments

The next 10 years will be critical to control climate change within the 'safe' limit below 1.5°C. The UN has warned that nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history – and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating. However, the current global economic and development model does not account for natural capital and the ecosystem services provided by biodiversity. We must remember that our economic growth is restricted by the 'planetary boundaries' – the ecological limits of the planet. The limits have fundamental impacts on our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide.

The peatlands are an essential part of this and an important resource in Northern Ireland for taking climate action. The planning system's role is to create a balanced system for people, nature and society to co-exist in harmony and it must be resourced and equipped to enable it to carry out this role.

Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)

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website at:
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