

COUNCIL FOR NATURE CONSERVATION AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

ROLE OF THE COUNCIL AND JOB DESCRIPTION

1. Constitution of the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (the Council) was established in 1989 under the provision of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.

Appointments to the Council, which consists of a Chairman, Deputy Chairman and not more than eighteen Members, are subject to the approval of the Minister of the Environment for Northern Ireland. The term of appointment is for a period of three years but Members may be eligible for reappointment for a second term, subject to satisfactory service.

The Council currently operates from 5 – 33 Hill Street, Belfast, BT1 2LA and is serviced by a Secretariat.

2. Role of the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

The role of the Council is to advise the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland on matters affecting the countryside of Northern Ireland and on nature conservation issues.

Its functions are set out in the 1989 Order. In summary, they are

- to advise the Department on matters relating to nature conservation;
- to enquire into and report on matters affecting the natural beauty or amenity of any place in Northern Ireland;
- to advise the Department on the establishment and management of national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, areas of special scientific interest and nature reserves;
- to advise the Minister on the establishment and management of Marine Nature Reserves;
- to advise the Department on the protection of wildlife species; and
- to advise on payment of grants to voluntary conservation bodies and on promotional and educational activities.

In practice, much of the Council's advice is channelled through the Department's Environment and Heritage Service, whose staff provides technical information to assist the Council in its work.

3. Structure of the Council

Membership of the Council is sought by means of public advertisement. However, in the interests of continuity, the Department has considered the reappointment of some existing Members, subject to the general principle that Members should not normally serve more than two terms in line with the Code of Practice established by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland. The Department will seek to maintain a balance between a wide geographical knowledge of countryside and nature conservation and an appropriate spread of experience and skills within the Council. The Department will seek to ensure, on merit, an overall representation which reflects the composition of the population of Northern Ireland in terms of community background, gender and ethnic origin.

4. Required competencies and experience of Members

No specific professional qualifications are required. However, applicants must be able to demonstrate knowledge of the management of land or aquatic environments. In particular, they should demonstrate experience in at least two of the following areas: agriculture, environmental economics, local government/public administration, access and outdoor recreation, forestry/estate management/land agency, fishing/aquaculture, industry/tourism/rural regeneration, environmental education, environmental organisations/PR experience on environmental matters, earth science, marine and aquatic science, terrestrial ecology, biology/botany/zoology, geography/environmental science, planning/landscape architecture.

In considering applications, regard will be given to whether candidates can demonstrate

- an active interest in the work of the Council; and
- experience of work related to nature conservation and countryside issues.

5. Duties of Members

Members are asked to attend and contribute to full Council meetings and participate on sub-committees. Previous Councils have met about six times a year, normally for a full day with two 2 day meetings. Meetings are held throughout the region. The Council has various working groups and all members are expected to serve on at least one. This would normally constitute 4 half days per annum.

Ad hoc meetings may be held from time to time to consider specific issues. The Council has also arranged five or six field visits during the summer and former Councils have held a three-day field visit in Great Britain during their term. Council members may be asked to contribute to the Council's Report, usually published at the end of the Council's Term of Office. On average, the time commitment for each member amounts to at least 1 - 2 full days per month.

6. Terms and Conditions of Appointment

The appointment will be for a period of three years, effective from 18 February 2006 with the possibility of an extension for a second three-year term, subject to satisfactory service.

Members will be expected to attend the Council meetings and they will be asked to serve on a working group. They will also be expected to attend some of the field visits. Membership does not attract a salary but an allowance for travelling and other out-of-pocket expenses, including a subsistence allowance, is payable in line with standard civil service rates. Expenses incurred in relation to the care of dependants will also be reimbursed where appropriate.

If after appointment a Member finds that, he/she is unable to make a satisfactory contribution to the work of the Council he/she may be invited to withdraw from the Council.

7. Code of Practice

In exercising their duties the Members of the Council must demonstrate impartiality, integrity and objectivity.

Communication between the Council and the Department will normally take place through the Chairman. The Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Members must at all times operate within the limits of its statutory authority as laid down in Article 4(3) and (4) of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Amendment) (NI) Order 1989/SI No. 492. This enables the Council;

- to advise the Department on the payment of grants to non profit making bodies to assist in the conservation of wildlife and/or the countryside subject to certain specified circumstances;
- to advise the Department on promotional and educational activities connected with the conservation of nature or the countryside;
- to be heard at any statutory enquiry relating to the conservation or protection of nature or the countryside.

Individuals should be aware of their wider responsibilities as Members of the Council. Like others who serve the public, they must follow the basic principles of public life as set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Nolan Committee).

Council Members must

- undertake on appointment to comply at all times with the code of practice that is adopted by the Council and with the rules relating to the use of public funds;

- act in good faith and in the best interests of the Council;
- not misuse information gained in the course of their public service for personal gain or for political purposes, nor seek to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests or those of connected persons, firms, businesses or other organisations; and
- ensure that they comply with the Council's rules on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality.

8. Handling of Conflicts of Interest

Members should declare from the outset any personal or business interests, which may conflict with their responsibilities as Council Members, commencing with completion of the relevant section of the application form.

A register of these interests will be kept. It will list direct or indirect pecuniary interests which members of the public might reasonably think could influence judgement. The register of interest will also include non-pecuniary interests of Members which relate closely to the body's activities or interests of close family members and persons living in the same household as the Council Member. If changes occur, Council Members should ensure that the register is updated. The contents of the register will be open to the public for inspection.

9. Appointment Process

All application forms must be submitted to the Department by **Friday 8 July 2005**. CVs should not be submitted. Each form will be acknowledged. Applicants will be short listed for interview on the basis of the criteria outlined in the application form. It is therefore essential that applicants indicate on their application form how and to what extent they meet the criteria. Applicants who are not shortlisted will be notified in writing as soon as possible.

Interviews will be held week commencing 3 October 2005.

The Department will publicly announce the appointment of the new Council by means of a press notice.