The Landscape Institute is the chartered institute in the United Kingdom for Landscape Architects, incorporating Designers, Managers, and Scientists, concerned with conserving and enhancing the environment. The Landscape Institute promotes the highest standards in the practice of positive placemaking through landscape planning, design, management and research, and represents members in private practice, at all levels of government and government agencies, in academic institutions and in commercial organisations.

The Landscape Institute is an educational charity and chartered body whose purpose is to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public. It champions well-designed and well-managed urban and rural places and spaces. The Landscape Institute’s accreditation and professional procedures ensure that the designers, managers and scientists who make up the landscape architecture profession work to the highest standards. Its advocacy and education programmes promote the landscape architecture profession as one which focuses on design, environment and community in order to inspire and deliver great places where people want to live, work and visit. The Landscape Institute is committed to the principles of sustainable development by improving the quality of design of urban and rural environments and to the protection and enhancement of our physical and natural environments.

The Landscape Institute Northern Ireland (LINI) represents the professional membership within Northern Ireland and is particularly concerned with design, management and planning for the enhancement of the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland.

NOTE:
As members of Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) we generally support and endorse comments submitted separately by that organization on this topic.

LINI Key Ask

LINI welcomes the opportunity to input to this important inquiry into ‘Democracy and Devolution’ in Northern Ireland and welcome the Committees recognition that for almost one year, there has been no functioning Executive in Northern Ireland.

The inquiry sets out to:- “look at solutions for restoring devolved bodies and accountability as well as investigate the need for further intervention from the UK Government. It will also examine the impact of the lack of an Executive on communities, public services and businesses and what can be done in the absence of an Executive to ensure Northern Ireland’s voice is heard”

As outlined above - LINI is principally concerned with positive placemaking through good design and stewardship; improving environmental resilience; accommodating sustainable economic growth whilst protecting, valuing and enhancing our limited Natural Capital assets.

Strategic policy development in Northern Ireland has stagnated.
However even with a functioning Executive, LINI believe that Environmental Governance in Northern Ireland generally has not been well served in recent years. Indeed, many regulatory failures in Northern Ireland have been attributed to the lack of an independent regulator:

“Although the presence of an IEPA is not necessarily a prerequisite for effective environmental protection, many of the regulatory failures that have occurred over the past 30 years have been attributed to this feature [lack of an independent regulator] of Northern Ireland’s environmental governance arrangements” (Brennan et al., 2017, p128).

The most important aspect of improving environmental governance in Northern Ireland would be the separation of environmental regulation and policy responsibilities.

**Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK that does not have an independent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).**

Over the past period, the trust between the electorate and our politicians has been significantly eroded. Indeed with devolution of planning function to Local Councils in 2015 there is concern that public mistrust in our decision makers could grow.

LINI believe there is little public confidence in our regulatory or enforcement activity with many examples of weak response to unauthorised and sometime illegal activities in recent years (particularly notable with criminal waste).

Good environmental governance needs transparency and accountability, coupled with an ability to engage stakeholders in a systematic and consistent way. Independence, moving environmental regulation away from the political arena and Government Departmental responsibility, would begin the process of restoring public trust in the system. Environmental governance structures should be free from political influence – the environment is a specialist area of public law, and needs to be protected from such interference.

LINI believe establishing a separate, visible and independent structure for the protection and enhancement of the Northern Ireland environment would have significant positive outcomes and would reinforce much needed public confidence.

Landscape Institute Northern Ireland believe this Inquiry has potential to shine a light of this issue and we would like to thank the NI Affairs Committee for the opportunity to contribute.

*29 December 2017*