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Making space for each other: North Belfast

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An aerial photograph of North Belfast, showing a dense urban area with a mix of residential and commercial buildings. A large body of water, likely a lake or reservoir, is visible in the center of the city. The foreground shows a grassy hillside with some trees and shrubs. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

Making Space for Each Other: North Belfast

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Making Space for Each Other: North Belfast

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1. North Belfast Challenges

In essence

North Belfast encapsulates many of the problems facing Northern Ireland as a whole. Five features stand out:

1. its **loss of industry** -- in terms of its textile mills, tobacco production, and dockland activity -- has been severe. It operates now without a dynamic economic base;
2. in turn, this relates to a severe and durable pattern of **multiple deprivation**;
3. its degree of **residential segregation**, both social and religious, has created an intricate pattern of small enclaves that render contact across divides problematic;
4. its witness to a disproportionate share of **violence during the Troubles**, with related legacy issues; and so-called 'leftover' paramilitary activity, together with contemporary hate crime also directed to an increased presence of other ethnic groups, mark it out as a place of bitter contest; and
5. there is a very **tight electoral contest** between Sinn Fein and the DUP, with implications for how any new housing allocations are seen in terms of shifting this knife-edge electoral arithmetic.

If a radical solution could be found to the challenges associated with these inter-connected conditions in North Belfast, it could point the way for the wider region.

Whose Boundary?

The first challenge is to define North Belfast. Various agencies adopt different geographies. Since territory and identity are very much tied up in this deeply divided part of the city, boundaries matter a great deal. Lack of common definition makes for a problematic spatial unit of analysis, and public policy intervention.

For instance, when estimating levels of housing stress between people from the two main community backgrounds, the figures depend on where the boundary is drawn.

Moreover, small divided geographical communities do not have the 'critical mass' to sustain any kind of sustainable development. So, viable public policy has to present the issues on a scale sufficiently large to permit appropriate development but also small enough to be able to properly monitor and judge results. On these terms, North Belfast (with a population of roughly 75,000) is appropriate for study and intervention.

But, it makes it difficult to develop a common North Belfast 'voice', when it's unclear who is being included. For the purposes of this study, we have mostly used the North Belfast parliamentary constituency. (For more detail, see Appendix I.I. on the website)

A Troubled Area

Although ideally situated (rising from the shores of a sea lough to a striking basalt ridge), North Belfast not only shares many of the problems of the less buoyant urban areas of the UK – loss of a traditional industrial base, spatial concentrations of deprivation, relatively low educational attainment, and the graveyard of many programmes targeted at the most deprived areas – but also exhibits specific problem characteristics of its own.

These include: historic concentration of Troubles-related violence, particularly in the form of sectarian killing; multiple, largely single-identity enclaves, with a record of incident and confrontation; and the post-1998 residue of 'paramilitary' intervention either as the physical force ideology of a section of republicanism or the criminal substructure that forms a prominent part of contemporary loyalism. Far from supporting what they presume to be their 'own communities', both these manifestations of enduring 'paramilitarism' impose further harm on already bereft people.

North Belfast thus represents a microcosm of some of the biggest challenges faced by the region as a whole and exhibits the unforeseen consequences of urban programmes that fail to grasp the complex and contradictory interplay amongst deeply seated social, political and ethno-religious processes.

It has been subject to the 'Zone Culture' (Enterprise, Health Action and latterly Education) and littered with partnerships which do not have the means to deliver meaningful co-production/integration of a range of services.

Examining the place in detail suggests most of all, that repackaging old programmes with new labels will not cut it as a serious attempt to transform the area. It is thus worthy of a new conversation about how its many problems should be tackled.

People and Place

Belfast is a compact, modestly-sized city, which has not been growing at the same level as similar cities in Britain. Between 1971-2011, it lost about one third of its residential population. Seen in that context, North Belfast itself is a small area. With this in mind, dividing the area further into a series of communities, many single-identity, for the purposes of 'community regeneration' poses two main problems:

- (1) the areas concerned are too small to offer the scale and scope for major development; and
- (2) given that the working class areas are mostly segregated on the basis of ethno-nationalist allegiance, the risk of rivalry for scarce urban resources becoming part of the general conflict around territory and identity is both immense and unhelpful.

Although North Belfast's population appears to be relatively stable (a small decline in numbers and a marginal increase of smaller-sized households from 2001-2011), the headline figure conceals significant changes. For example, those of Catholic Community Background (CCB) became the majority (52.6%). But, more than a majority, the CCB population is younger (possibly assisted by inward migration from post-2003 EU states) with more than half (51%) aged under 40. Conversely, a much higher proportion of those of Protestant Community Background (PCB) is aged over 65. (see Appendix 1.2 on the website)

Thus, North Belfast has seen a younger, more buoyant Catholic-background population looking to extend its presence in an area that (as measured by the Dissimilarity Index) is more segregated than the city as a whole. Given North Belfast's history of inter-communal animosity, it is unsurprising that some from Protestant-background areas may feel a sense that they are literally 'losing ground'.

Indeed, as a reflection of this spatial shift, some of the small areas that became more 'mixed' in the 2001-11 decade may be no more than undergoing a transformation into a different community identity -- in most cases, a 'Catholic' identity.

This is no longer just a case of declining Protestant working class presence. Whole areas like the more affluent parts of Oldpark, Cliftonville, Cavehill, North Circular, and Antrim Roads are characterised by Protestant middle class departure. (For more on segregation, see Appendix 1.3 on the website)

The Thorny Housing Issue



Related to this demographic shift, is the issue of housing need. Although publicly accessible data prevent definitive conclusions, it would appear that 'Catholic' housing need in NIHE designated North Belfast (particularly for families with housing need and households with housing stress) is more pronounced than for those from a 'Protestant' background.

Yet allocations don't appear to reflect that, hence continuing accusations of housing discrimination. However, if social housing remains largely segregated, such problems have no easy solution. Many new 'windfall' sites for development are likely to be subject to contested space. Put bluntly, many formerly 'Protestant' sites may come up for possible 'Catholic' housing.

Faced with multiple instances of intimidation (very difficult to prevent), the NIHE encourages, but cannot enforce, mixed housing. Moreover, those who have lived in single identity communities have understandable reluctance to be allocated a

house where there is possibility of threat or (given largely segregated education provision) children will have to travel far to school.

Building new homes (apart from the resource implications in an age of fiscal austerity) may even be seen as a threat to other neighbourhoods, who fear creation of new flashpoints, with consequent risk to good relations. The contrary argument is that 'good relations' cannot trump equality based on need, and that indeed ultimately, good relations depends on equality.

Thus, in the short term, dealing with housing need and promoting community cohesion may be in tension. Yet, this stark conundrum is not being faced openly, amidst all the talk about a shared city.

Given the very tight electoral arithmetic in North Belfast between the two main political traditions, new housing can be seen as a means of shifting the current pattern of political allegiance, and with it, crucial electoral outcomes.

All of the above is what happens when different sections of the population are changing at different rates, have different social needs, different political

allegiance, and are distributed across places (and indeed schools) that are highly segregated.

Separation also operates at a social level. In North Belfast, there is little sign of socially-mixed neighbourhoods. Moreover, the concentration of violence for over three decades in the working class areas has tended to reinforce the 'distance' between those areas and nearby middle class districts.

Interestingly, in the 1950s and 1960s, there were examples of socially and religiously mixed communities. For instance, in Cliftonpark Avenue and adjoining 'river' streets, such as Roe, Avonbeg, Annalee, etc. residents were from mixed backgrounds. Moreover, the Housing Trust, which allocated homes on a non-sectarian needs-based system, were responsible for estates such as White City, near Bellevue, which were very successful in creating stable cross-community neighbourhoods. (For elaboration of the White City experience, see Elliott, M. (2018) *Hearthlands*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press)

This kind of integration before polarisation in the 1970s and thereafter, shows that religious residential segregation was not a pattern imposed by Unionist



governments of the past, and need not be the inevitable pattern now. However, if the concept of a shared city is to be more than an empty slogan, the difficulties outlined above have to be faced with candour and fairness. (See Appendix 1.4 on the website for more detail)

Moving Up the Social Ladder

The world around Northern Ireland is changing fast. Labour markets increasingly require new aptitudes and capabilities. If doomsday predictions about the impact of Artificial Intelligence have any substance, up to half of existing jobs will go, without the kind of secure job replacements that emerged from previous waves of technological advance. Those able to thrive in such an environment will have to be both flexible and capable of synthesising different kinds of knowledge in pursuit of new economic applications. The threat to current jobs is such that debate about Universal Basic Income is attaining new urgency.

Whether the GCSE/A Level educational pathway favoured in Northern Ireland prepares children for this new labour market is questionable. Nevertheless, together with grammar schools, many middle class people and a large swathe of politicians seem determined to defend it. Whether appropriate or not in these terms, the current education system does not provide well for working class children in North Belfast. Together with Belfast West, it has the lowest success rate for 'good' GCSEs amongst the Northern Ireland parliamentary constituencies.

However, within the area, the pattern is sharply unequal. Some of its schools are among the best performers in Northern Ireland, as measured by examination success. Some Super Output Areas (SOAs)-- for example Cavehill 2 -- have over 90 per cent of school leavers with five GCSEs, including English and Maths, and over 80 per cent of their working age populations with high order qualifications. In others, (e.g. Woodvale 2 & 3) the record is more depressing – three quarters

of school leavers fail to achieve the standard measure of GCSEs, and over 60 per cent of the working population are without significant qualifications.

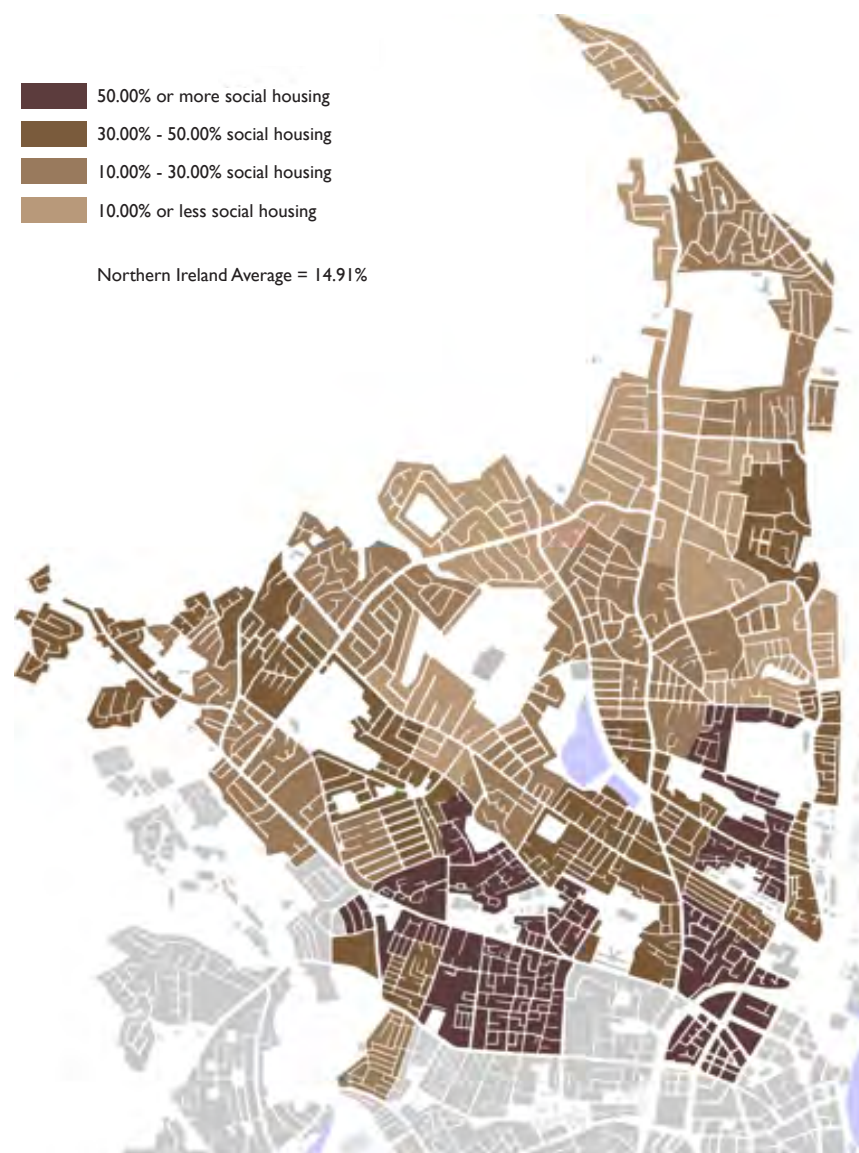
Overall, the trend seems to be:

- **Girls perform better than boys;**
- **Grammar schools perform substantially better than non-grammar schools;**
- **Pupils not entitled to free school meals perform better than those entitled, and;**
- **There is some indication that school leavers from poor Catholic areas perform better than those from poor Protestant areas.**

Care needs to be taken with the last feature. For instance, school performance data have to be treated cautiously. Noelle Buick, the Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) has drawn attention to how some pupils do not get entered for exams, and thus are invisible in official statistics about pass rates.

Essentially, the 'poverty gap' in educational attainment is bigger than the 'gender gap', which is bigger than the 'religious gap'. Unless such inequalities are addressed, Northern Ireland in general, and North Belfast in particular, will have significant sections of its working-age population increasingly 'left behind'. This carries considerable implications for many of the other problems faced by the region.

Persistence of these trends, despite the considerable attention paid to educational under-performance, suggests the need for completely new thinking. For a start, do the standard educational pathways, the proliferation and duplication of school sectors, and the social divisions within education, really serve the best interests of school children and Northern Ireland as a whole? (See Appendix 1.5 on Education and Appendix 1.6 on the Economy and Deprivation on the website)



Above: Percentage of population that is economically inactive (16-74 years). Source: Census 2011, dataset KS601 NI

The poor are always with us?

Related to education and the economy is the more general problem of deprivation. Across successive deprivation studies going back to the 1970s, and confirmed by the 2017 Multiple Deprivation Measures, areas in North Belfast figure amongst the most deprived in the region. Like elsewhere, those areas identified as Catholic are disproportionately represented, though places like Woodvale match anywhere for social need.

Probably more important than the historic distribution of deprivation, is the fact that it has been long recognised as a persistent and severe problem, and a succession of interventions (particularly in Belfast) has been designed to tackle it. What is evident is the disproportionate share of North Belfast wards within the most deprived, going back as far as the Robson deprivation study in the 1990s.

Recent official data from Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA: Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures: 2017) indicate the following:

(1) Of the **100 most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs)** in Northern Ireland, on the Multiple Deprivation measure, 50 are in Belfast, comprising 29 per cent of the city's 174 SOAs -- the highest share for all Local Government Districts. Within this picture, 5 of the 10 most deprived SOAs are in Belfast, with North Belfast featuring significantly: Waterworks (2) is ranked second; Ardoyne (2) is fourth; New Lodge (2) is seventh, while Ardoyne (3) is ninth. Woodvale (1), which fringes North Belfast is ranked eight.

(2) On the **Income Deprivation Domain** (% of population living in households whose equivalised income is below 60 per cent of Northern Ireland median), of the worst 100 SOAs in the region, Ardoyne (2) is ranked eight, and Woodvale (1) is in seventh position. Taking the **Employment Deprivation Domain**, of the worst 100, half are in Belfast, and again North Belfast comes out badly, with New Lodge (2) ranked first; Waterworks (2) at second, and New Lodge (1) at ninth.



Ardilea Street

Of the worst 100 SOAs on the **Health Deprivation Domain**, 59 are in Belfast, representing just over a third of its 174 SOAs, again the highest share of all Local Government Districts. Of the worst 10, half are in Belfast, all North Belfast: New Lodge (2) ranks third; Waterworks (20 at fourth; Ardoyne (3) at sixth; Waterworks (1) at eight; and New Lodge (1) at tenth.

In terms of **Education, Skills and Training Deprivation**, of the worst 100 SOAs, 56 are in Belfast, accounting for 32 per cent of its 174 SOAs, the highest share of all Local Government Districts. New Lodge (3) ranks first; Crumlin (2) at tenth, while Woodvale (1) and (2) come in at second and third respectively.

With regard to **Crime and Disorder**, of the 100 worst SOAs, 45 are in Belfast, representing 26 per cent of its 174 SOAs, the highest share of all Local Government Districts. Half of the 10 most deprived in this domain are in Belfast, with Waterworks (3) ranked fifth.

Like elsewhere, not everybody in North Belfast, or even in its most deprived areas, is poor. There are many high-income, work-rich households, living in some of the best housing, arguably in the most picturesque part of Belfast in terms of natural environment. There is a stark contrast between these and the poorest areas, where benefit dependent populations with little or no capital, and relative low life expectancy, live lives of great economic, and indeed, physical risk, from the activities of the remnants of 'paramilitarism'.



Living Environment

North Belfast is blessed with a striking natural environment from the Cavehill to the Lough. Yet, this asset is under-appreciated and under-used. No 'greenway' connection exists among these positive features. Moreover, there is no visual coherence between the natural and built environments.

The immediate 'public space' people face when they step outside their houses is generally low quality urban environment, unattractive to pedestrians, particularly those in wheelchairs or pushing prams: patchy tarmac replacing perfectly good flagstone pavement; proliferation of litter and graffiti; desolate unused areas; and extensive dog fouling, for which there is weak deterrent (see Appendix 1.7 on the website). Barely a utility or postal box is unmarked by graffiti. This is truly the 'broken window' syndrome, whereby such ugly defacement is left to linger to a point which discourages effort to keep the place tidy. Absence of trees and flowers in many parts contribute to the bleak appearance. Dealing with this low standard condition is an obvious starting point before anything more ambitious is tried to improve appearance.

Multiple so-called 'peace walls' scar the area, and despite tentative improvement in one part of Ardoyne, and partial opening of the shameful partition in Alexander Park, many of these structures have assumed a permanence that bodes ill for long-term cross-community contact. Alongside these grim barriers, there is 'wedge-planning', such as the Hillview Enterprise Park, a drab corridor, that acts to separate 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' enclaves within both Oldpark and Crumlin Roads.

This uninviting setting is aggravated by a fractured urban fabric. Transport corridors, such as M1, M2, and Westlink, not only impede physical connection across the area, but also are visually unappealing. Roads have been built with scant regard for negative impact on nearby neighbourhoods. In some areas, like parts of York Street, the effect is to create a desolate and forbidding cityscape.

Alongside this car-favoured infrastructure, public transport concentrates on arterial routes, offering poor linkage across the area. (For further detail on the living environment, see Appendix 1.9 on the website).

Overall, when considering the dismal state of the physical and social environment in the area, two things are striking:

- for a successful, inclusive and shared city, such disparity cannot continue – at the very least, it will perpetuate underlying tensions and greatly undermine quality of life for all; and
- dressing up old programmes in new names will not solve the persistent predicament.



The problems related to inequality are real, substantial, and persistent. What has been done so far is not enough. (See Appendix 1.6 on the Economy and Deprivation, and Appendix 1.8 for details on health on the website). In being more bold, perspective is useful. North Belfast has many problems, though with many signs of great effort and potential.

But can politics, as it operates in North Belfast, offer a democratic response? At present, the prospect is unpromising. The two main blocs of unionism/loyalism and nationalism/republicanism are in such tight contest, and the representation

of that duel has become ever more embodied in the two main parties, that any new development and any changed use of space can easily become tied up in the heightened battle for electoral supremacy (see Appendix 1.9 on the website).

Thereby, over the foreseeable future, there is risk of the ‘sectarianisation’ of key development projects in the area, particular those involving the issue of housing. That risk can only be abated if there is political and public will to choose an alternative. That alternative has to start with learning the lessons from previous interventions, which are considered in Section Two of the study.

100 Most Deprived Super Output Areas by Multiple Deprivation Measure

Rank	Super Output Area
2	Waterworks 2
4	Ardoyne 2
7	New Lodge 2
8	Woodvale 1
9	Ardoyne 3
12	Woodvale 2
15	Waterworks 1
16	Ardoyne 1
17	Woodvale 3
21	Crumlin 2
24	Crumlin 1
25	New Lodge 1
32	New Lodge 3
49	Duncairn 1
53	Duncairn 2
56	Waterworks 3
87	Glencairn 1
88	Legoniel 2

2. What Has Been Achieved?

This section addresses various policies and deliveries made by government, statutory agencies, alongside the private and voluntary sectors in North Belfast.

Physical Context

From the mid-1970s, there has been comprehensive redevelopment in some traditional working class areas in North Belfast, and in many cases of this process, terraced housing in grid streets was replaced by cul-de-sac formations. Together with road infrastructure and the creation of buffer zones like the Hillview Enterprise Park, these physical structures have arguably restrained opportunities for physical mobility and cross-community encounter, particularly between working class communities. Given other underused sites -- some derelict, some converted into car parks -- the general result is an urban fabric that is spatially fragmented and disconnected. Alongside this pattern, so-called peacelines and low prioritisation of public space reflected in pervasive dog fouling, litter, potholes, cracked tarmac, and lack of street furniture and trees, all make for a pedestrian unfriendly environment. At the same time, government and the community sector have not been idle.

Series of Urban Programmes and Plans

Since this comprehensive physical redevelopment in the mid-1970s, there have been many urban programmes in North Belfast, including Belfast Areas of Need (BAN); Belfast Action Teams (BAT); Making Belfast Work (MBW); URBAN 1 and 2; Neighbourhood Renewal; Renewing Communities; Areas at Risk; Local Community Fund; PEACE 1, 2, 3 and 4; Strategic Neighbourhood Action Programme (SNAP); and so on, alongside smaller interventions like the Community Environment Support Programme and Local Employment Access Partnership. North Belfast has participated in other broader schemes, such as: Carnival Arts Programme; Renewing the Routes; and Re-imaging Communities. In addition, there have been various initiatives such as Sure Start and integrated Health Centres.



New networks have been established such as: Community Empowerment Partnerships; North Belfast Community Action Unit; and North Belfast Conflict Transformation Forum. Out of some of this have come strategies and plans, such as: North Belfast Interface Steering Group Action Plan. Other sources of funding and support have been active, such as the International Funding for Ireland (IFI) and the Community Relations Council (CRC), with the latter supporting initiatives such as the Skegoneill Glandore Common Purpose.

All told, collectively and cumulatively, this input has amounted to considerable public spend and positive outcome. But, it has not changed significantly the five key issues identified in Section 1 as pivotal to North Belfast's regeneration. Yet, the results are depressingly familiar – an evaluation of ten years of neighbourhood renewal was unable to conclude: that the gap between most deprived and other areas had lessened; that partnership was a successful model for tackling deprivation; or that community divisions had been reduced – this despite an investment of over £150 million. Again, it emphasises the need to think anew.

This re-think begs the following questions:

1. to what extent are these to be considered strategic long-haul interventions designed for radical transformation?
2. do the myriad initiatives not indicate a problem with sustaining deep-rooted collaborative relationships?
3. do they not represent at best a series of parallel processes rather than a serious focussed approach?
4. does the multitude of partnerships and plans not contribute to a further muddling of an already over-crowded and confusing policy environment?
5. is any meaningful lesson ever drawn from evaluation of these interventions? For instance, the lesson drawn supposedly from the experience of BAN and BAT in the 1970s and early '80s was the need for a more long-term, unified, and strategic approach, involving a bigger geography. This led to a revised MBW programme, which established the North Belfast Partnership. But, instead of resourcing and sustaining the authority of this framework, it was increasingly sidelined by 1990s, with subsequent adoption of small-scale intervention again, such as Neighbourhood Renewal. This has given rise to a sense of 'going round in circles'.
6. does this topsy-turvy 'policy faddism'; related short-term resourcing; and 'ground-hog day' re-cycling not produce an attrition and cynicism among many actors, who justifiably think: 'we've heard it all before'?

However, none of this critique is to understate the positives.

Good Things Happening

In a difficult situation, many good initiatives have been adopted at local level. For instance, TASCIT (Twaddell, Ardoyne, Shankill Communities in Transition) has a mission to achieve 'positive transformation and normalisation of interface communities' within a vision of 'a city without walls'. Alongside the North Belfast Interface Network and Galvanising the Peace Working Group, and sources such as the Duncairn Social & Cultural Centre, the Wave Trauma Centre, Intercomm, and many others, there is persistent effort being made to build cross-community relations. Some manifestation of this work is found in: the opening of Bradley Manor; the Houben Centre; the R-City Cafe; the removal of the Crumlin Road interface wall; and agreement to close the Twaddell Camp. Some of this collaborative effort has involved contact across the divide, involving organisations in the Shankill, Ardoyne, Twaddell, Ballysillan, and Marrowbone. These on-going efforts, which often receive little media attention, rightly deserve acknowledgement. Alongside this, there is successful social enterprise development, as evident in the Ashton Centre, and award-winning social housing from the Newington Housing Association.

Yet, despite this sterling work, key problems remain. Since these are not the exclusive responsibility of any one sector, no sector should be off-limits to criticism. The community/voluntary sector has issues about which it can be usefully self-critical: the limited achievement of greater coordination and rationalisation; the need for fresh thinking within the sector; the need for improved transparency and democracy in some of its organisations; the tendency in some cases to over-focus on inputs such as funding, expansion, and investment in new buildings, rather than discernible outcomes; the difficulties that some community activists have in standing up to sectarian acts within their own communities; and the questions raised by, on the one hand, the positive role played by community activists genuinely pursuing the goal of a shared society, and by contrast, those who present themselves as 'community workers', but yet retain vestiges of paramilitary association. All told, this emphasises the challenging environment within which community activism operates.

Given the deficits on all sides, it is worth examining in more detail one strategic approach to address the challenges in the area.

The Strategic Regeneration Framework for North Belfast

In 2007, the Department for Social Development (DSD) authorised a Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) -- a comprehensive plan -- for North Belfast to cover the following decade, establishing an overall strategic vision and context to guide planning and regeneration, and setting investment priorities, while linking into existing and emerging projects and policies. Just over a decade later, it is opportune to assess what proposals were actually delivered from the plan.

First, in its general appraisal of the difficulties facing North Belfast, the report noted the following:

'Too many residents of North Belfast still suffer from high levels of social, economic, and environmental deprivation, despite significant amounts of public investment in regeneration programmes and measures...Despite political stability following the peace process, inter-community tensions remain in some interface areas...Many communities remain insecure and focused on preserving 'their' area and do not share a common North Belfast identity...There are other obstacles to overcome. In particular, there would be invaluable benefits in re-connecting the area with the rest of the city. The difficulty of accessing the city centre caused by the physical barriers of the Westlink, M5 and M2 has reinforced a strong sense of isolation with many in North Belfast feeling cut off and neglected'.

(Deloitte, commissioned by Department for Social Development, through North Belfast Partnership, 2007, p.5)

Four major strands dominated the plan's content:

(1) leadership and community cohesion: it noted that 'North Belfast lacks a united elected and civic leadership that shares a common agenda and long term goals'. (p. 30)

(2) land use and connectivity: in this regard, it referred to its contained geography/topography: 'Bound by hills to the west and shoreline (and the M2/

M5 motorways) to the east, North Belfast's environmental boundaries limit the extent to which the area can be developed'. (p.30)

Given this natural restriction, the impasse around contested land is all the more significant. Here, the report claims: *'Contested space is the most significant issue regarding land usage within North Belfast....(This) is relevant to land allocated for housing which would fulfil a need for the nationalist community more than the non-nationalist community. There is a considerable amount of unused space around many of North Belfast's 20 physical interfaces, as well as derelict houses'*. (pp. 30-31).

It notes in terms of transport policy that the *raison d'être* of 'road structures such as the West Link and M2has been to facilitate commuting rather than connect areas of Belfast to the city centre and each other. With a relatively low car ownership in North Belfast, public transport is crucial'. (p.31)

In similar vein 'the urban gateways to North Belfast from the city are not pedestrian friendly. Both Clifton Street and North Queen Street need improvements in regard to appearance and accessibility by foot'. (p.31)

(3) neighbourhood vitality: here, it refers to the unwelcoming aspect of sectarian murals; the congested nature of commuting road traffic, while only just over half of North Belfast households have access to private transport; housing stress, particularly acute in New Lodge, Ardoyne, Cliftonville and Cavehill, together with the unwillingness of people to move to another area; the decline and disrepair of social housing; the low level of private rented accommodation, relative to other parts of Belfast; the limited private house building; the problem with housing affordability, since 'in 2006 only one per cent of first time buyers on median income in the area could afford to buy property in North Belfast' (p.33); need for more mixed tenure sites; empty houses at interfaces; and the persistent pattern of sectarian violence, with 'two thirds of all reported sectarian attacks in 2006-07 (occurring) in North Belfast'. (p.34)

(4) education, skills, and enterprise: the report notes: 'A disturbing 12 out of the 19 wards in North Belfast are within the ten most educationally deprived wards in

Northern Ireland as regards education, skills and training. Six of the other seven wards are in the top 50% most educationally deprived wards in Northern Ireland' (p. 36)

It goes on to state that with nearly one in four of North Belfast's population under 16, education is pivotal to long term prospects. Workforce training in high growth sectors such as information technology, finance, and high value services is under-developed in an area whose employment profile shows under-representation of people employed in professional and managerial posts, relative to Northern Ireland. With its smaller economically active population compared to the rest of Belfast, its higher levels of working age population claiming unemployment-related benefits than elsewhere in the city, and its lower rates of self-employment than the rest of the region, North Belfast's economic base is very weak.

Taking the four main headings: leadership and community cohesion; land use and connectivity; neighbourhood vitality; and education, skills and enterprise, it is useful to make an assessment of what progress has been made.

(1) leadership and community cohesion: Unfortunately, disparate 'leadership' in the area persists. There is no over-arching agency that is assigned responsibility for an overall coordinated strategy and delivery. If anything, the position now is worse than in 2007. The North Belfast Partnership, designed to bring a partnership of inter-sectoral agencies and stakeholders together to unite behind a common platform, now itself has been terminated. Despite modest improvement, such as the removal of a 'peace wall' in Ardoyne, there is no substantial evidence of better relations among divided communities.

(2) land use and connectivity: The vision was that 'North Belfast makes the most of its strategic sites in ways that provide opportunity for all, that development is well planned and that the area is well connected to the city and other areas of opportunity'. (p.40) It identifies the following examples of strategic sites: Crumlin Road Gaol; Girdwood; Crumlin Road Courthouse; North Foreshore; and expansion of Ulster University at York Street. For instance, with respect to the Girdwood/Gaol location, it says that: '....it is planned that the site

will be a mixed-use one with tourism, leisure, retail, entertainment, wellbeing, sports, and play components. (p. 46) As our case study on Girdwood; and comment on the North Foreshore, the Courthouse, improvement of key gateways; and assessment of application of under-used land all suggest, this agenda has so far fallen well-short. (See Section 2 on our website)

(3) neighbourhood vitality: The report emphasises the urgency for more social and affordable housing within a context that offers prospect for *'more mixed religion housing areas'* (p.52); a mix of housing types and tenure to promote social diversity and community sustainability; and overall high quality design. Multiple policies have been launched around housing strategy, urban regeneration, and shared communities. (See details in Section 2, on our website)

Allocation of social housing on the basis of need and equality in North Belfast has been subject to long-standing dispute. Essentially, the argument from the broadly nationalist perspective is that housing need is considerably greater on the Catholic side, and that this need is not being met, even where land becomes available for building new social homes. In retort, a unionist view is that 'housing need' can be seen in broader terms, and that the population loss in mainly Protestant areas can be halted or even reversed if new housing is used as a tool of regeneration, and speculative quality housing development seeks to attract back some of those who have left. Besides, in some cases, the brownfield land for new social and affordable housing can be judged to be in or near Protestant areas, with the implication that de facto extension of Catholic areas with new housing at worst leads to incursion into previously Protestant territory, or at least risks creating new flashpoints.

The counter- argument to these propositions is that: (1) there is crucial difference between housing need and demand, with the principle of equality privileging the former over the latter; and (2) greater community cohesion cannot be purchased at the price of greater social exclusion. The goals of good community relations and equality are complementary rather than contradictory. (For elaboration of this issue, see Section 2 on our website)

One example of how this contest about housing and land plays out in particular instances comes with competing proposals to redevelop Hillview Retail Park, and more specifically the site of the old Dunnes store off the Crumlin Road. While one side saw this opportunity site as offering prospect mainly for much-needed new housing, the other side wanted an alternative plan for multiple retail units, including a car show sales room, fast food premises, and restaurant, a mixed use development on an interface that it was claimed held potential for up to 300 jobs. In 2017, the latter proposal won approval from the Belfast City Council Planning Committee by a narrow majority vote.

In the decade after the strategy, as indicated in our detailed analysis (see our website), allocation of social housing remains problematic.



Former Dunnes Store site, Crumlin Road.

(4) education, skills and enterprise: While effort has been made to address attendance and attainment in schools, the problem of applying resource efficiency to tackle educational inequality persists. For instance, despite the prospect within a more rationalised Catholic system of seeing grammar schools like St Malachy's and Fortwilliam merge with secondaries to become more comprehensive in ability range and co-educational, the status quo has prevailed. The 'mergers' have been restricted to the secondary schools. Arguably, the situation is worse now for secondary schools as places in grammar schools have expanded, thereby reducing the ability range available to non-grammar schools, to the detriment of this sector.

For North Belfast residents to benefit from any economic development, basic provision is needed of: affordable childcare; better public transport to employment centres such as the city centre and Mallusk, including its involvement with the new Rapid Transport System; tailored programmes for the long-term unemployed; skills enhancement geared to new high value-added sectors; and specific initiatives, such as the Employability Access Project, linking the jobless with entry level posts at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, NIHE, and Belfast City Council.

Optimising industrial land in or near North Belfast means, in part, looking at how the following assets can be efficiently managed and suitably linked together and with other employment centres like the city centre and Mallusk: the docks area; Edenderry Industrial Estate; York Road; Glenbank Business Park; Ballysillan Industrial Estate; Hillview Enterprise Park; and Carnmoney Industrial Estate. Much needs to be done to make this happen.

In terms of overall regeneration, there have been new health centres and schools. Taking the regenerative impact in the Health Sector, out of a wave of new Wellbeing & Treatment Centres constructed across the city, two were developed in North Belfast, namely, The Grove Wellbeing Centre on Shore Road, and the Carlisle Wellbeing & Treatment Centre on the Antrim Road. These centres were designed to offer a range of health services under one roof, located outside the hospital boundaries and set closer to residential areas. The ambition for the

build quality of all the centres was high, and the aim was that the services be placed in neutral space to ensure accessibility to all.



Above: Wellbeing & Health Centre development in North Belfast

The largest budget expenditure of all of the seven centres in Belfast was the Grove Wellbeing and Treatment centre on the Shore Road. The concept of the building was to group together key services in one space, that is, a health centre, a leisure centre and a library, thereby catering for all aspects of 'wellbeing,' involving both body and mind. This approach was the first of its kind within Northern Ireland and offered great potential, linking services through creation of potentially shared space, connecting to a main road and a park. While the concept and thinking behind the centre can be applauded, the difficulty lies in its accessibility as a space easy for all communities to enjoy and share. The siting of the building, in an established Protestant area, on a part of an arterial route that is dominated with territorial markers right along its main entrance, limits the



Above: Positive development of social amenity sites such as Crumlin Road Gaol



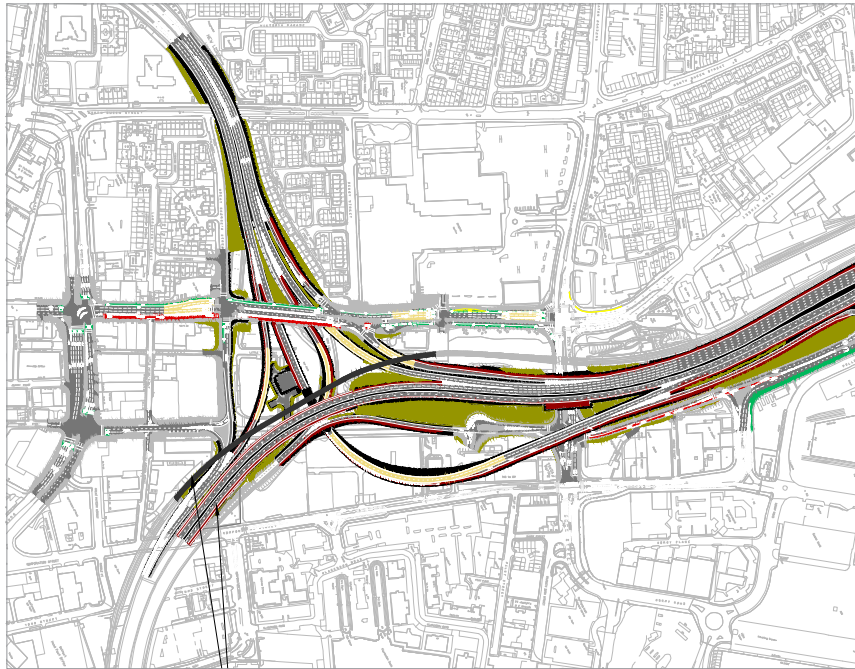
Above: Proposal for University of Ulster

potential this building has to be a key catalyst for social inclusion and cohesion in North Belfast. Similar questions about the location of, and access to, the Carlisle Centre off Lower Antrim Road may be raised in terms of use by people of a Protestant background. This raises the issue, when there is investment available for such a significant space: should it not link to a wider strategy, a masterplan for its location and form that is consistent with the vision for a shared city?

Housing Associations have developed in places such as Crumlin Road, Torrens, and Limestone Road. Renovations have provided new social amenity in the Indian Cultural Centre, Crumlin Road Gaol, Girdwood, and Duncairn Centre for Culture & Arts. But costs and benefits of other proposed development are more disputable. There is the York Street Interchange for example, a major publicly funded scheme (£165 million) located between the city centre and the New Lodge and Tiger's Bay, which will see the current junction between the M1, and York Street transformed into a multi-level junction -- offering possibility of additional tunnels and flyovers that will make it harder for North Belfast residents to access the city centre.

Adjacent to the lands earmarked for this project sits another major development scheme (£250 million) -- the new Ulster University campus, comprising several blocks between Donegal Street and Frederick Street, and projected to attract an additional 12,000+ students and 1,300 staff to the northern edge of the city centre. Despite the additional courses and related activity it will bring to the area, adjacent inner city residents have to be persuaded of its community gain. In the immediate area, this development has triggered student accommodation schemes, with risk that they will be effectively gated communities offering little social benefit to their hinterland.

Moreover, these latter projects highlight how many of these developments relate poorly to each other; indeed happen in isolation of each other, and are often implemented by different agencies that don't link up their respective policies to form a coherent all-encompassing strategy. On top of that, often physical proximity remains unexploited and spatial linkages between projects under-developed.



Above: Proposal for York Street Interchange



Above: Neighbourhood surrounding the proposed Interchange

In short, the Strategic Regeneration Framework strategy has largely failed to deliver its ambition. It has not seen all levels of government work collaboratively behind the shared vision to lend statutory authority and resources to integrated planning. It has not sustained an inter-sectoral partnership-led approach, with roles and accountability for delivery clearly dispensed and owned. Mainstream funding to support the strategy's priorities has not been entrenched in the Programme for Government, and departmental public spending allocation and delivery procedures have not been clearly established, and set targets effectively monitored.

It all raises some obvious questions:

- (1) if a statutory approved regeneration strategy has so under-performed, relative to the strategic challenge, what hope is there for serious transformation of the area?
- (2) to what extent are there entrenched interests -- such as in education -- whose lobby power will always resist reform in order to maintain sectoral advantage?
- (3) how can new policy and funding arrangements get away from indulging the concept of small insulated communities and related inter-community rivalry, instead of operating on a large-scale, cross-community basis?
- (4) as local political over-sight takes more command over the planning process, can progress be made without calling out and tackling fundamental toxicities such as sectarianism?
- (5) in addressing the problems, are the data, usually presented, telling the whole story about aspects such as drug abuse, housing need, and exam attainment?
- (6) as with the general society, are the middle and upper class prepared to turn a blind eye to the prospect of a growing underclass as long as the impact of deprivation and so-called paramilitary violence can be largely contained in working class areas?



3. A Way Forward for North Belfast

Review of past policy and practice suggests the need for a radical transformative approach that faces down sectarianism, and entrenched interests that benefit from the status quo, supported by new administrative and funding arrangements that operate on a large-scale and cross-community basis.

In identifying this new planning and regeneration paradigm, this section suggests a way forward for planning and regenerating North Belfast. It is not intended as a blueprint, but rather as a set of flexible ideas open to engagement with others - the point is to put them on the table for a conversation with all (including the political parties) who are serious about changing North Belfast.

The section sets out:

- (a) an outline **vision** of the area's future;
- (b) **key principles** that would underpin this vision, and provide a platform for
- (c) **development goals**, tempered by recognition of the resource, institutional, cultural and project environment; and
- (d) the **delivery** and **measuring** of **good practice**

A. Vision

The vision for North Belfast a generation hence would be to have its citizens create, with government support:

an open pluralist place, with connected quality built and natural environment, increasingly free from sectarian geographies and gatekeepers, and other social walls of division, offering equal opportunity for all citizens to learn, achieve, and socially contribute, and whose stability is rooted in social solidarity and the rule of law.

B. Key Principles

Alongside specific principles for good practice in provision such as housing and education, there is need for overall Development principles, which have to be aligned with long-stated government goals-- at both Stormont and Belfast City Council level -- of creating a shared, cohesive and inclusive society. Thus:

(1) assessment of development proposals for planning permission and/or funding has to first ensure **their compliance with these central objectives of good relations; cohesion; and inclusivity;**

(2) decision-making in development should be **transparently democratic in a way that exposes and counters any sectarian considerations;**

(3) instead of examining the worth of single schemes separately, **each proposal needs to be framed within the overall development strategy for the area** -- does the proposal add to, or subtract from, the strategy?

(4) rolling out such a strategy requires **co-ordination and collaboration** across the main sectors. Statutory authority -- through instruments like planning permission and public land use -- and government funding, should be used to incentivise this cooperation;

(5) rather than a series of supposedly new initiatives, whether from government or community, **the emphasis should be on adding value to good interventions already happening**, funding to the scale and duration needed for transformative improvement;

(6) in selecting 'effective practice' for this further support, **measuring success requires independent evaluation**, rather than assessments commissioned by the programme promoters;

(7) the **effective development path starts with people, rather than projects or programmes**. The central questions are: (a) who pays the cost? (b) who are the beneficiaries? and (c) in development disputes about land use and development options, where lies the power?

(8) factoring in these principles, there is need to **emphasise human values rather than just human rights**. While the latter tend to focus on individual/group entitlements, concepts such as respect are to do with values not rights, and values concern how one treats others, not exclusively how to get something for oneself;

(9) ideas for tackling North Belfast's problems need to be framed within a wider agenda for distributing wealth more widely by extending ownership of capital and a fairer model of wealth and corporation taxation -- as outlined in detail, for example, in **IPPR (2018) Commission on Social Justice: Prosperity and Justice: a Plan for the New Economy: the Final Report of the IPPR Commission on Economic Justice**.

These principles are complementary to the 10 guideline principles about developing space within a contested society, given in this report's twin document, called: **Making Space for Each Other. (2016) Belfast, Queen's University.**

C. Development Goals

These have to address the five challenges facing North Belfast, outlined in Section 1: its **weak economic base**; severe and durable patterns of **multiple deprivation**; its long-standing **residential segregation**, both social and religious; its high share of Troubles-related **violence**; and (5) its **tight electoral contest**, which requires monitoring and regulatory mechanisms to ensure that resource allocation is not influenced by calculation of its impact on electoral arithmetic. Thus, the Development goals comprise more effective approaches to:

1. Renewing the Economic Base
2. Tackling Multiple Deprivation
3. Redressing Residential Segregation
4. Promoting the Rule of Law; and
5. Establishing Democratic and Accountable Development Delivery

Renewing the Economic Base

Some economic anchors persist in wider North Belfast. One such is the Belfast Harbour, whose operating profit was £34mn last year, up by 5.6% on 2016. This gain was based on a turnover, which last year rose by 6.5 per cent to £61.9mn., an increase due to enhanced port use by freight vehicles (513000) and passengers (up to 1.5 mn on the three Stena Line ferry routes); arrival in the city of 5874 ships, including 155000 cruise tourists; alongside income generated by property investment, such as the City Quays office development, the AC Marriott hotel, and new film studios. Belfast Harbour invested £42 mn in regenerating capacity and facility last year, with future planned investment set at £130mn. All this offers jobs prospects available to residents in North Belfast. (see **Belfast Harbour: Annual Report & Accounts. 2017. Belfast: Belfast Harbour**).

However, the traditional mills, factories and dockland jobs that once underpinned North Belfast will never return. Even the idea that the area's economic revival will depend on employment sources within it, is long outdated – around 80,000

jobs in Belfast are held by people who don't live in the city. Rather, areas thrive when they are pleasant to live in or visit, and when they are well connected to other parts of the city. Numerous US studies have demonstrated that knowledge intensive professionals are more inclined to move because they are attracted to living in particular places, rather than because they seek employment there. Exciting cities attract the most qualified, the most mobile, and this contributes substantially to the development of agglomeration economies.

The economic challenge for North Belfast is how to become a place where people want to live, a place without internal barriers, and one that is fully connected to the rest of the city. Equally important is how to ensure that those currently living in the area are fully capable of seizing economic opportunity.

As already described, North Belfast already has some of Northern Ireland's highest performing schools and some areas with exceptionally qualified populations. This pattern is not uncommon – Kensington's average household annual income exceeds £125,000 and yet the borough contains some of the poorest areas in London. The focus must therefore be on those people and those areas currently disconnected from opportunity. Education, housing and civic amenities have a huge role in this respect.

Take three brief examples of how an integrated planning approach could contribute to a vision of a shared, inclusive, and economically vibrant North Belfast:

(1) the creation of a quality Greenway, stretching from the shoreline, through the Grove playing fields, to Alexander Park to the Waterworks, through the Cliftonville Golf course and nearby former reservoir, through to Ballysillan playing fields/Colin Glen to the wider Cave Hill. For walkers, runners, cyclists, and tourists, this would provide a safe connected space across currently sectarian territories; add to environmental assets; beautify the area; and indicate how the most blighted dead zones scattered throughout North Belfast might be uplifted and stitched back into the urban fabric. In short, such environmental inputs have economic dividends;



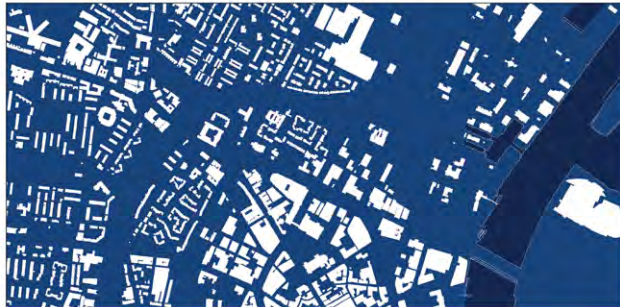
1832



1865



1935



2010

(2) another example of the kind of direct development link that needs to be made concerns the economic viability of a new Ulster University city centre campus. To help raise the necessary capital for a quality campus, maximum gain from its surplus Jordanstown site has to be achieved. In part, what may help in that regard is to have a comprehensive plan for the site that includes mixed tenure housing that, in turn, can help alleviate the housing stress and segregation in North Belfast; and

(3) redressing the spatial concentration of social housing -- and with it the corresponding single identity nature of these areas -- has to involve commitment to ensuring that the new proposed residential capacity in the city centre is of mixed tenure and community background. Such pluralist city centre living forms a key attraction in economically ambitious cities.

What happens within a city sector is crucially dependent on the overall city context. At one level, Belfast is thriving – its Gross Value Added per head dramatically exceeds other parts of Northern Ireland (even allowing for those commuting to work there); it has seen enormous growth in tourism and the creative industries; and it is even a regular stopover for large cruise ships. Niche sectors like the Titanic quarter, ‘Thanotourism’ (related to death and conflict), and the attraction of Game of Thrones sites that have experienced substantial growth. Yet, as depicted earlier, Belfast still contains disproportionate concentrations of deprivation and working-age economic inactivity. Thus, the central challenge is how a broader swathe of residents gets to share in the city’s fortunes.

Conventional wisdom suggests that public sector intervention in the economy should only occur in conditions of market failure. In this view, the role of the state is managing macroeconomic policy, infrastructure and investing in skills. More recently, however, people like Mazzucato (*The Entrepreneurial State*, 2011, London, Demos.) have suggested that fostering horizontal networks and underpinning key elements of Research & Development are keys to dynamic economies. It appears that innovation requires the combination and evolution

of complementary technologies. Arguably, responsibility for fostering growth and innovation is being diligently undertaken by regional agencies. However, recent economic growth in Northern has been driven largely by the Services sector, although output is still four per cent lower than its series high in the final quarter of 2006. The Production Sector's output growth has been patchier, with a five per cent decline in the most recent year (DETINI 14/06/2018 Economic Output Statistics). The contrast with the performance of Britain's economy is marked, even though it has been, of late, amongst the slower growing economies of the OECD. Whatever the efforts of the regional economic development agencies, all this suggests that more needs to be done, particularly through the new economic powers of the City Council, linked to regeneration funding in relevant government departments and foundations, and whatever residual EU monies can be tapped.

Within economics, the debate that cities (rather than national policy) have become the drivers of competitiveness is well advanced. However, there is now a growing debate about how cities could be centres of opposition when the nation state has been captured – such as 'sanctuary cities' in the US or the more general idea of David Harvey's 'Rebel Cities'. Similarly, with Stormont in abeyance, there is the possibility (and responsibility) for urban centres to make radical breakthroughs in long-standing problems. Belfast City Council should embrace this challenge as opportunity for entrepreneurial local government.

Tackling Multiple Deprivation

There are compelling arguments for spatially focussed regeneration programmes:

- the added value achieved by coordinating a range of programmes across a particular area via partnership organisations;
- the possibility of complementing social with physical and economic investments;
- the necessity to tackle problems like sectarianism at a whole community level;
- the opportunity to enable community members to fully participate in the transformation of the places in which they live.

And yet, evaluation of many such programmes has frequently pointed to less than optimum achievement. Financial accountability protocols create difficulties for public bodies to 'bend or blend' public monies for agreed common purposes. The level of community participation tends to be via community organisations rather than mass involvement of people. Choosing areas because of their ranking on deprivation indices may also create problems – first, by allowing a 'race to the bottom' whereby communities actually want high deprivation scores since these are perceived as the gateway to development funds; and second, many poor people live outside areas deemed to be multiply deprived.

Area based programmes can also be undermined by other changes to public policy, particularly welfare reforms like Universal Credit that actually reduce the real incomes of the poor (see **National Audit Office, Rolling Out Universal Credit**, June 2018). Finally, running renewal programmes in small scale spaces in a divided city like Belfast may augment, rather than undermine, inter community competition and reinforce mutual suspicion.

Accordingly, while Belfast needs a conversation about how the limitations of area-focussed programmes can be addressed, it also needs an alternative conversation about preventing people falling through programme gaps and remaining disconnected from opportunity. As shown in section 2, four decades of urban anti-poverty programmes have delivered modest outcome. There is need

for a new regeneration perspective that starts with people rather than projects or programmes. The central questions that this approach raises concern what democratic service integration would look like, and how that debate could be fostered in Belfast.

This has been tried before. For example, in the final year of the last Labour Government, the **Total Place** initiative was launched. Thirteen pilots were set up, covering a population of 11 mn, 63 local authorities, 34 primary care trusts, 12 fire authorities and 13 police authorities, together with a very large number of Third Sector organisations. What is striking about the pilot reports is the commonality of issues addressed: (see **Association of Greater Manchester Authorities & Warrington (2010), Total Place Report, Manchester. Birmingham City Council, (2010), Birmingham Total Place Pilot Final Report, Birmingham. Bradford District Partnership (2010) Total Place Pilot Final Report, Bradford HM Treasury, Communities and Local Government (2010), Total Place: a whole area approach to public services, London**)

- Local services tend to treat symptoms rather than causes – Birmingham noted that 93 per cent of the city's employment spend was on benefits, compared to seven per cent on helping people into work;
- Relatively small numbers of people incur disproportionately high expenditure – Manchester cited the cost of school exclusions – one 'criminal family' in Birmingham was estimated to have cost the city £37 mn over three generations;
- Local services were not seen as coherently addressing people issues and concerns – there is a need to build services around people rather than agencies; - Manchester, 'putting the customer at the heart of service redesign will help lead to solutions as opposed to service delivery';
- 'Silo' based funding discourages collaboration to cut costs – employment programmes can reduce reoffending, but the cost reduction to criminal justice is not shared with local employment agencies;

- There is a need for a robust evidence base on cost-effectiveness – Birmingham proposed 'a new partnership-wide intelligence and analysis capability which will help us find and apply cost-benefit evidence as well as generating new strong evidence through local pilots'(p.9);
- There is a need to rationalise city-wide back-office activities and to fully share information;
- People and communities need to be supported to do more for themselves;
- Efficiencies can be delivered by 'freeing up' local government and increasing trust – Manchester (p.94), 'too much of what we do is 'covering our back' or 'justifying why we have done something'. If we adjust the balance between the state doing everything for the citizen and taking calculated risks and reduce the investment in checking and justifying that is the two checkers for every one doer scenario – then this will also produce significant savings for the public sector'.
- Total Place was not just a 'public sector' project. Third Sector and private sector partners were an integral part of the solutions and need to be actively involved in the leadership, development, implementation and delivery of the Total Place solutions (Bradford);
- Seek to secure 'top level' leadership across the city and put in place a strong management team with appropriate support to drive the initiative (Bradford).

The central government assessment (**Treasury/ Communities and Local Government**) was positive (p.5):

starting from the citizen viewpoint to break down the organisational and service silos which cause confusion to citizens, create wasteful burdens of data collection and management on the frontline and which contribute to poor alignment of services; and providing strong local, collective and focused leadership which supports joined up working and shared solutions to problems with citizens at the heart of service design.

Whether **Total Place** would have evolved into a radical new approach to local services or joined the Elephants' Graveyard of failed public initiatives cannot be known since the 2010 General Election result led to a changed direction of public policy. The real question is – can anything be learned and applied to Belfast?

First, the difference of context and governance arrangements should be acknowledged. Local authorities in England have more responsibilities and substantially bigger budgets – Total Place spending audits revealed that the local authority and health were the biggest spenders, with the former having responsibility for education, social services and residual housing powers. Within Belfast, none of these powers lie with the City Council. Accordingly, the task of building greater co-operation is that much more complex. None of the pilots had as violent a history as Belfast though, interestingly, the Bradford report failed to mention its community relations history. Second, Total Place could only work within an enabling framework from central government and with a substantial relaxation of centralised regulation and performance management – even with a functioning Executive, the concept would have to be sold to a governance system with its own internal difficulties of territoriality and competition.

Other initiatives have had a micro focus on particular households. For example, **The Swindon Life Project** (Cottam H. & James R. The Life Programme, Participle, London 2013/14), started with a family that was being 'serviced' by 73 professionals at an annual cost of £250,000, and asked its members what changes they wanted to make in their lives. The impact may have been modest, but was easily measurable. This later evolved into the **Troubled Families Programme** designed to replicate the Swindon results on a wider scale, although this was primarily the government's response to the 2011 riots - any initiative can be bureaucratised and gamed for political purposes. Equally, the danger of 'people-centred' initiatives is that they may actually stigmatise those they are designed to help (see **H. Fearn The money wasted on 'troubled families' was not even the biggest problem with this disastrous policy, The Independent, 18/10/2016**). The formal evaluation of the programme was more measured -

even with little evidence of statistically significant impacts (p.69), families 'were more likely to report managing well financially, knowing how to keep on the right track, being confident that their worst problems were behind them' (see **Laurie Day, Caroline Bryson, Clarissa White, Susan Purdon, Helen Bewley, Laura Kirchner Sala, and Jonathan Portes National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme, Final Synthesis Report, Department for Communities and Local Government October 2016**). In any case, given that the programme was managed through 152 local change programmes, each with considerable autonomy, unambiguous outcomes would have been hard to measure.

There are other, more ambitious ideas around. For example, Gutierrez (see **B. Gutierrez, The Open Source City as the Transnational Democratic Future, in Varoufakis et al State of Power 2016, Transnational Institute**) champions the idea of the 'open source' (as opposed to smart) city where citizens can literally write the city's future through online deliberative democracy platforms and participative municipal budgeting. Since practical experiments in this direction are being implemented (particularly in Spain), Belfast City Council could explore their relevance, particularly if they can combine the best of these initiatives with a successful application for City Deal funding, which offers serious money for long-term strategic intervention.

The bottom line is that no urban programme offers a panacea to the multiple, interconnected problems experienced in areas like North Belfast. However, unless people are put at the centre (both as needing support and as decision makers about the nature of that support) of regeneration efforts, they are unlikely to transform the areas at which they are directed. In turn, that requires surveying the widest possible field of urban initiatives and being prepared to examine fresh ideas.

Key to tackling deprivation in the long term is a radical shift in education. As shown in the previous Sections, the educational landscape in North Belfast is challenging. The data show that some schools are performing well in terms of

their pupil profile. Conversely, some schools, with a similar profile, are performing poorly. As a result, too many children miss out on good career opportunity.

So, the first key principle for a step-change in educational outcomes in the area is a zero tolerance of under-performing schools. Given the central role of quality education in tackling poverty and social inclusion, the serious ambition has to be 'no child left behind'. The current model of educational provision helps perpetuate social inequality.

Raising standards in under-performing schools demands a new radical framework, informed by the need to get beyond separate focus on individual schools, to a mechanism for shared responsibility for the education of all children in North Belfast:

- a collegiate approach, which builds on networks such as the North Belfast Area Learning Community;
- specifically, amalgamating sets of schools, under a specially appointed Board of Governors, comprising people with a skills set geared to transforming under-performing schools;
- unifying post-16 education, pre-university, that rationalises among schools and between the school sector and further education. A new concept based on the Sixth Form College could be one model;
- attracting, rewarding, and retaining highly qualified and motivated teachers, with an expertise in addressing educational under-achievement;
- sharper focus on developing learning approaches and curricula attuned to the profile of the pupil base, and that seeks to hone those cognitive skills that provide foundation for life-long learning;
- effective pupil-teacher ratios that allow for the nurturing of pupil self-control; good communication skills; educational field-trips available to all; and for substantive teacher-parent relationships;
- incentives for parents to volunteer in the classroom, supported by parenting classes, and other relevant learning and social services;
- strong links with the wider society, including the economy -- anticipating the kind of creative and portable skills and critical thinking demanded by future work;
- a special engagement with the new local campus of the University of Ulster, initially based on a ten-year Memorandum of Understanding;
- in turn, this networking would extend to a strong linkage with effective community development organisations;
- within this over-arching framework, targeted early intervention programmes, which ensure literacy and numeracy capacity for primary school entry;
- setting useful targets, such as reducing the number of young people who are categorised as NEETs (not in education, employment, or training) to zero by a time-limited period.

In addressing both structural and cultural dimensions together, the above offers a short to medium-term response to the pressing issue. Longer-term, consideration has to be given to:

- (1) redressing the social and educational cost of academic selection, which favours the grammar school sector to the disadvantage of the secondary school sector;
- (2) the heavy financial cost of duplicated school provision, based on four main categories at present: Integrated; Segregated; Grammar-Secondary; and Irish Language-medium;
- (3) the merit of persisting with a curriculum and teaching format geared to an examination and targets system -- particularly in post-primary -- that is increasingly out-of-step with the much needed creative and critical thinking skill-sets;

While gender and religious gaps are important to consider, the big issue is the poverty gap, whereby children from less favoured social circumstance are prone to do less well within our current system. This is not to underplay the connection between, for example, social and religious background.

The interesting prospect for a radical re-think comes from a recent Northern Ireland-wide representative survey on education policy ahead, undertaken by LucidTalk, and published in March 2018. Among its findings are the following:

1. 99.5% put 'good educational standards' at the top of their priorities.
2. 74.4% said they favoured a school that is welcoming to all sections of the community and to all faiths, compared to a quarter (24%) favouring a school that reflects a particular single faith or cultural identity.
3. 67.2% would support their local/children's school becoming integrated.

All this suggests that public opinion could be very receptive to the kind of proposals outlined above.

Redressing Residential Segregation

As noted in Sections 1 & 2, the issue of housing in North Belfast is at the heart of political and social debate. And this is now spilling over into debates about housing-led regeneration in the central city. Belfast City Council, as part of the development plan process, wants to increase the population of the city by 70,000 over the next fifteen years. So, what sort of vision does Belfast City Council have for the development of new housing as well as existing neighbourhoods?

The Preferred Options Paper makes a number of key points about new homes:

- a percentage of all new homes in larger developments (should) be affordable;
- (they should be) integrated with general needs housing, within mixed tenure developments;
- a policy requirement (will be) to help deliver mixed and balanced communities;
- (there will be) an appropriate mix of housing specified in relation to key housing land allocations and development opportunity sites to help promote choice and assist in meeting community needs;
- an appropriate proportion of new homes on strategic housing sites to be built to Lifetime Home standards, so that they are adaptable enough to match changing needs of people throughout their lifetime.
- A community cohesion approach is the preferred option. The promise is that the Local Development Plan (LDP) 'will include an over-arching strategic policy to encourage all new development to promote community cohesion and make a positive contribution to community relations.'

It is in the context of the next 'plan strategy' stage of the LDP that an overall policy on housing can be developed and expressed. In February 2018, the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Northern Ireland launched a project, sponsored by the Department of Communities (DfC) to 'rethink' the purpose

and form of social housing in the region. Such a re-think in Northern Ireland (with consequent application in North Belfast) may benefit from the following considerations, which are themselves underpinned by general development principles outlined later in this Section:

1. citizens have a right to decent affordable housing;
2. concern about the quality and safety of social housing has to be addressed;
3. adequate investment in good quality social housing is required for those unable to meet their housing need in the private market;
4. such provision does not include the right to specify the location of that housing, no more than such a right exists for those in the private housing sector;
5. housing should be a key part of a wider process of place-making in a divided society that prioritises quality design; mixed tenure; mixed use; and social and ethno-religious integration that help to nurture greater diversity and pluralism;
6. in new housing settlements, particular care should be taken to prevent existing single-identity areas extending in ways that increase residential segregation that is at odds with government objectives to create a shared civic society;
7. the catalytic role of housing in supporting regeneration of areas that have endured decline and abandonment has to be recognised;
8. land availability and price are crucial factors. Transparency around publicly-owned land; opportunity sites; issues of 'land banking'; and cases for compulsory vesting for the public good, all should allow for greater public awareness and debate;
9. more imaginative ways of involving local people in area transformation should be adopted. This includes frameworks such as a Community Land Trust (CLT), as a not-for-profit agency controlled by local cross-community residents to build affordable homes that are permanently held by the Trust;

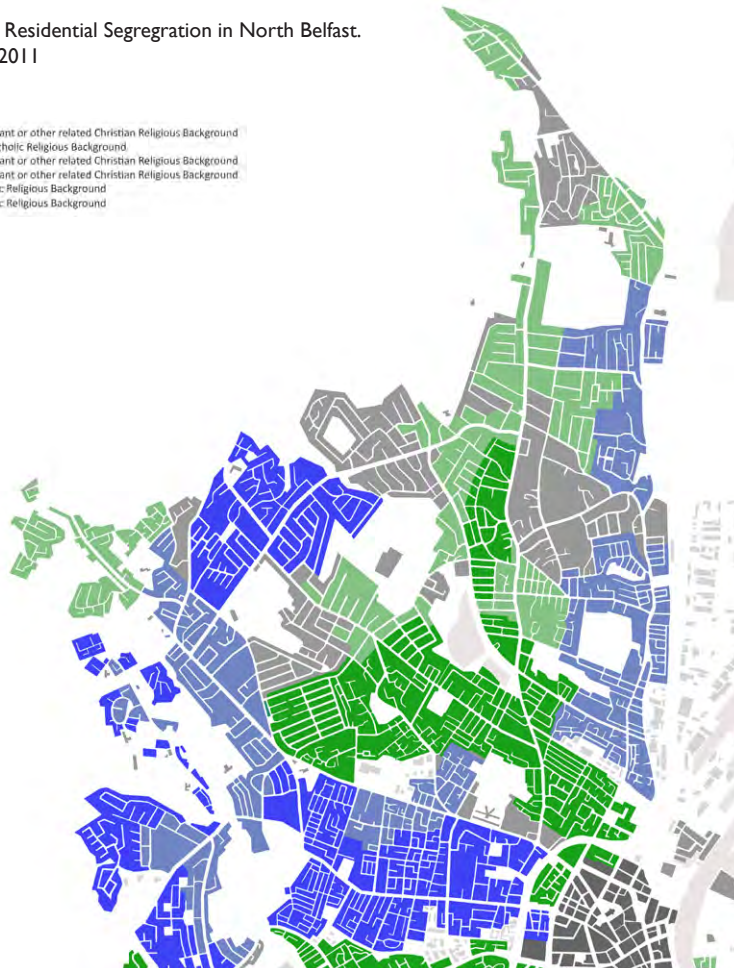


10. schemes for shared housing should allow for an inter-agency (including PSNI) agreement that everything will be done to protect the occupants from sectarian intimidation;
11. to protect the city centre for shared housing, with mixed tenure, and with the social housing allocated from a 'shared' waiting list from both main community backgrounds -- a shared neighbourhood that can potentially roll out from the centre over time to the main radial routes and beyond;
12. all of this still leaves the central conundrum in North Belfast housing -- particularly marked in its social housing. The greater need for social housing comes from those of a Catholic background, whereas supply side factors, like land availability, work to the advantage of those from a Protestant background;
13. one possible way to redress the 'Catholic' housing need is to look to sites in places like Glengormley and Ligoniel. Yet, this is not problem-free. For instance, if a development such as Feldon becomes in effect a new Catholic area, when it was supposed to be a shared housing scheme, does this not also run counter to the 'shared city' objective?
14. up to now, public bodies like the Housing Executive are embroiled in this dilemma and controversy. It should not be left to the Housing Executive to shoulder this burden alone. Properly, it should be examined within an open and candid debate, involving a wide range of government agencies and departments, alongside community and civic organisations.

A more recent publication ('Mainstreaming mixed-tenure in Northern Ireland: the way forward for developing homes'. Department of Communities, and Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations. 2018), endorses some of the key points set out above. This 'thinkpiece' argues that mixed-tenure development has the potential to deliver wider social benefits, including tackling disadvantage and segregation. Significantly too, the report notes, that the planning process, particularly the new Local Development Plans, will be key to progressing this agenda.

Map showing Residential Segregation in North Belfast.
Census data 2011

< 60% Protestant or other related Christian Religious Background
 and < 60% Catholic Religious Background
 > 60% Protestant or other related Christian Religious Background
 > 60% Catholic Religious Background
 > 80% Protestant or other related Christian Religious Background
 > 80% Catholic Religious Background



Promoting the Rule of Law

All the proposals and recommendations set out here have to be set in a context that acknowledges the wider need to move to a less segregated and more 'civilised' society. The 'Rule of Law' and tackling 'paramilitarism' is at the core of this.

Given that we have moved from a majority-minority society to one of multiple minorities, the once dominant British culture is bound to be challenged in the interest of achieving a more pluralist society. This is going to mean that Unionists experience change as loss -- diminution of population, territory, and cultural dominion. Thus, policies designed to promote equality are likely to be taken as policies of reverse discrimination. In this regard, there has been under-appreciation of how strategies for social inclusion can be unintentionally at odds with those for social cohesion.

The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement contained many positive features, and was important in establishing the principle of 'consent', and in decreasing the levels of organised politically-motivated violence. But, instead of evolving and maturing, the Agreement has been less successful in nurturing, as intended, the prospect of a shared future. Much of this conundrum, as manifested in the current political impasse, raises questions as to how far the Agreement, and its subsequent modifications, as a package represents an ethno-religious accommodation rather than a civic settlement. Instead of constructing a settlement on an agreed set of (universal) values, Northern Ireland made do with a 'peace deal' that cantonised both functionally (dividing up the departments of state) and spatially (the passive acknowledgement of each other's 'turf'). The unsurprising result is a pattern of dividing up territory, rather than one that genuinely pursues conflict resolution through pathways of conciliation that are more likely to lead to a shared society.

The problem is compounded by the way in which political power is secured and maintained. Each side only needs to be hegemonic within its own community. Thus, the leaders who are meant to promote integration actually rely on division to maximise their electoral base. The Agreement has effectively squeezed 'middle



ground' politics, leaving two dominant political forces, each representing a single community bloc, in a fragile unity whereby government departments -- when the Executive is in operation -- adopt contradictory positions depending on who is the minister.

It is in this context that we still talk about helping 'communities in transition' to pass over the line to total conformity with the Rule of Law. After nearly a quarter of a century of official ceasefire, why should such communities still be in transition? When does 'transition' stop within the elastic concept of 'coming out of conflict'?

Post-Patton, we are left with a much reduced police service, that has resource deficits in addressing both past and current violence. Accordingly, it needs reinforcement to tackle criminal activities (drugs, prostitution, rack renting, and petrol smuggling) by a criminal justice approach. The clear message should be 'no more transition'. Taking these groups at their word -- that they have left the stage. -- lawless behaviour should be seen not as 'paramilitary' in form, with even a hint of political motive, but rather as organised criminal conspiracy. The very title of 'paramilitary' should not be legitimated.

In similar vein, addressing systemic issues that may be seen to create the social environment conducive to recruiting young people into 'paramilitarism' needs to be treated with great care. Programmes to redress poverty and disadvantage should be based solely on objective needs criteria, and resources allocated transparently according to this condition. Again, if extra public funding is distributed to communities distinctly because they are places in which these militant gangs operate, there is high risk that it can be seen as an attempt to 'buy them off' --- a lawless message to give out to the vast majority in such areas trying to do the right thing. In short, compensatory social programmes should not be talked about with any reference to so-called 'paramilitaries'.

One major step in the way forward is to proactively seek recruitment into the police service from working class communities. Civic organisations -- community and voluntary groups, churches, etc--- together with political parties, should proactively support the police in this recruitment drive, and a concerted effort will be required to ensure that police officers and their wider families remain safe within their own communities.

Establishing Democratic and Accountable Development Delivery

The Belfast City Council has had significant planning powers returned to its authority. In terms of democratic accountability, this offers great potential. However, in a deeply divided city/society, there is risk that some key development decisions may be filtered through sectarian electoral interest.

The dominant pattern in North Belfast elections involves close rivalry between DUP and Sinn Fein, largely due to Sinn Fein squeezing SDLP votes in the nationalist/republican internal contest, and the DUP similarly marginalising the UUP. But, the fundamental shape of the unionist-nationalist divide has been evident for some time. For instance, in the 2005 local government elections, the combined DUP/UUP vote represented a 41.6 per cent share, compared to a joint Sinn Fein/SDLP share of 41.3 per cent. In such a tight contest, development, particularly

new housing settlement, holds potential to shift the electoral arithmetic, and thus, there is risk that some politicians will view development proposals in terms of their implication for sectarian headcount. One way to minimise this risk is to ensure that all key development proposals are considered under objective criteria and monitored by senior officials in a publicly transparent way. In turn, these criteria need to be informed by a set of principles, outlined above.

In translating these principles to show how they can play out, two examples illustrate their importance. First, taking the issue of coordination and collaboration, a major development deficit concerns the failure of government agencies to work with each other to achieve more effective outcomes. More particularly, the absence of an overall strategic approach to planning and regenerating inner north Belfast continues to result in poor co-ordination, and, as a consequence, many missed opportunities. This has meant that a range of major projects such as the York Street Interchange (YSI), Ulster University campus, Royal Exchange, Cathedral Quarter, City Quays etc have been, or, are being, developed individually, without realising the potential benefits of synergies, overlaps and spin-offs. Issues that have dogged inner north for years, such as: the fractured environment; disconnection with the rest of the city and between neighbourhoods; population loss, sustained deprivation and educational under-achievement; housing opportunities; and the potential for new and revitalised living environments -- all still need to be addressed within an enforceable strategic approach.

Second, there is the case of building on existing planning and policy frameworks. So, we have to examine how the range of existing and ongoing projects in North Belfast can fit with, and gain from, Belfast City Council's Local Development Plan and Belfast Agenda processes, and indeed, how these projects can, in turn, inform an improved practice within mainstream 'planning and regeneration'.

For instance, an initiative led by Belfast City Council is the Campus Community Regeneration Forum (CCRF), whose focus is on exploring the potential mutual benefits for local communities arising from the development of the new Ulster

University campus. Recent restructuring of CCRF resulted in the creation of three sub-groups: Physical / Spatial; Employment / Economic; and, Education. Communities involved in this initiative form an arc around the campus and include Lower Shankill, New Lodge and Sailortown. This initiative has the potential to demonstrate not only the progressive role that an anchor institution can play working with its neighbouring communities, but also the productive interaction between community and spatial planning.

Another example of building on existing initiatives relates to North Belfast's significant assets. One such asset is its built heritage. The North Belfast Heritage Cluster is a network of voluntary organisations with responsibility for the area's historic assets. Its overall goal is to deliver heritage-led regeneration, galvanising the area's authentic character to support economic and social development. Essentially, this is about identifying, developing and using the area's distinctive qualities to create a more confident sense of place.

The Cluster's work has five aims, to:

- Deliver economic regeneration
- Improve the physical infrastructure
- Inspire community involvement
- Increase learning opportunities for all
- Build confidence

The fifteen members stretch from St. Anne's Cathedral in the City Centre to the North Belfast Working Men's Club, just over a mile up the Crumlin Road. Taking in major civic landmarks, local places of worship, and individual buildings that are locally important, its membership reflects and respects the area's diverse heritage, but collectively, the Cluster represents a significant part of Belfast's story, both past and future.

Another key initiative which aims to address the rather fractured environment of inner North Belfast is the proposal to create an Urban Unit. The inner core area of North Belfast is facing unprecedented change. The York Street

Interchange (YSI) will see 47 acres of intense construction. And, of course, the Ulster University development will bring substantial numbers of staff and students along with the development of many other sites and opportunities.

There is a need to lever tangible benefits from all of this to ensure better quality environment and more effective connectivity into wider North Belfast. The City core is growing, but it is not coming closer to communities either in the inner city or further afield. Moreover, if arteries and streets that feed all of North Belfast are not repaired near the “economic driver” of the city core, then all of North Belfast will miss out.

The proposal is to create a small core team -- an Urban Unit -- which would partner with Universities and economists to draw in visioning resources and tools to help build the economic case for strategic projects. This is designed to enable North Belfast to articulate its case at regional funding level. Given that ‘impact’ is a key measure of university research, the Urban Unit would offer real urban design projects, that would be informed by local and wider community context and knowledge.

Some key projects already identified include: the renewal of the York Street Station site; a bridge to Titanic Quarter; the modification of the York Street Interchange to facilitate the restoration of local connectivity; a city building for Youth Services on the blank site at the corner of Frederick Street to provide an important urban gateway repair and to link Youth aspiration to the adjacent Ulster University; and the heritage-led regeneration strategy developed by the North Belfast Heritage Cluster.

Within the north and west sides of the city centre, a number of initiatives are also in the process of being advanced. These will have significant impacts for the future development of north and west Belfast. The Inner North West Masterplan (INWM) consultation responses are currently being considered by Belfast City Council and the reconfigured Royal Exchange is going through the formal planning process. In relation to both of these initiatives, the following points can be made:

- With regard to the INWM, some attempt has been made to address the issue of disconnection between the adjacent inner city neighbourhoods and the so-called masterplan area. However, the detail of this needs to be teased out, and, in turn, this should have as much status as the main content of the rest of the masterplan.
- The historic fabric of the area needs to be assessed in overall townscape or streetscape terms, not just in relation to individual buildings of merit. Castle Street, North Street, Donegall Street and York Street, historically, were very much part of the everyday life and geography of inner north and West Belfast, with direct connections from the Shankill, Falls, Antrim, Crumlin and York Roads.
- A major concern about assessing the merits or otherwise of both sets of plans relates back to City Council’s and DfC’s ambitions to create a ‘city centre living environment’. While the phrase might capture some sort of loose vision of what this might be, it has not been properly fleshed out. And yet this is crucial. Who will live there? What supportive infrastructure is required? As noted elsewhere in this report, the development of the central city offers a major opportunity to create an environment that breaks down the barriers of age, class, ethnicity and religion.

D. Delivering and Measuring Good Practice

The Campus Community Forum and the Heritage Cluster show effort at coordination and collaboration. But, they are insufficient to achieve radical change. What North Belfast needs to take forward the agenda outlined here is a Development Agency with statutory authority and inter-governmental funding to forward North Belfast's regeneration within a wider urban geography. In turn, the Agency needs to be embedded within the new planning powers accorded to Belfast City Council. The latter is in the process of preparing both a Local Development Plan (LDP) and a Community Plan (the Belfast Agenda), with the ambition to have strong links between the two.

However, the challenges for both are enormous, not least because Council powers for comprehensive development, and its budget, are limited. Significantly, though, for the first time in decades, City Council can take the driving seat. Many of the specific issues facing North Belfast are identified generically in the first stage LDP publication, known as the Preferred Options Paper (POP). These include references to the physical and psychological aspects of division, and to the fragmented and disconnected city. The paper also refers to the potential opportunities to promote shared sites and facilities.

However, a number of the consultation responses to the POP raised further issues such as: the lack of co-ordination and strategic thinking between Government agencies; as well as the need to properly resource those communities, which are often excluded from planning and regeneration processes. Also, there is the vexed question of new housing in the city, particularly its location, as well as its role in delivering community cohesion.

While it must be acknowledged that the early stage of BCC's LDP process has identified issues previously largely ignored by planning and regeneration agencies, the crucial question remains about how they are tackled. Indeed, implementation has to be a key dimension of the next stage in the LDP process. This is, in part, what distinguishes traditional land use planning from the new paradigm of spatial planning.

Traditionally, development plans in Northern Ireland set out land use zonings

accompanied by a suite of policies. Once adopted, implementation of the plans was largely left to the private sector and, of course, this was regulated by the development control process.

The turn to spatial planning which City Council seems to have embraced requires a more interventionist and proactive process. Moreover, it is one that is in constant interaction with the delivery of the Belfast Agenda. However, all of this needs clarity in terms of the practical steps that need to be taken to ensure that both strategic and local neighbourhood issues are addressed.





Measuring Success

Under the subtitle 'Measuring Success', the Belfast Agenda promises to set up 'a robust monitoring and evaluation framework ... as part of the implementation process.' This will involve data collection, analysis, and so on, designed to facilitate consistent approaches to data collection, analysis and evaluation, and will add to the existing evidence base. While research, monitoring and evaluation can inform policy and strategy development, its real value lies in ensuring that ongoing delivery is responsive to changing needs and environments' (p47).

This report would argue that monitoring, measuring and adapting are vital dimensions of good contemporary planning practice. However, this needs to stretch across the two, supposedly integrated, planning processes – spatial and community. Key ambitions around housing, particularly housing mix, addressing disconnection and barriers, sharing space, improving modal split, dealing with educational disadvantage --- all of this and more, needs to be monitored. Arguably too, there needs to be greater clarity about how the two processes will work together and inform each other. Again, key policy areas such as housing, community relations and the economy would certainly benefit from this.

Granted, the critique presented here can itself be criticised for dismissing the 'good' in vain search for the 'perfect'. But, the hard reality is that despite the worthy interventions over decades -- which are recognised here -- overall indicators have not been significantly shifted, for example, reduction of the gap between the more and less deprived areas. In the same way, Invest NI annual reports depict improvements. Yet, Gross Value Added (GVA) per head (productivity) stubbornly remains at 75 per cent of the UK level. A new approach to measuring 'success' has to assess the impact of any particular initiative in relation to its compliance with central objectives such as creating a shared society, and to its specific contribution to the kind of vision outlined here.



Context: Belfast Local Development Plan

Planning of North Belfast has to sit within the wider Local Development Plan for the whole city, and the draft version of this has been released recently by Belfast City Council.

There is much in the language of the Draft Plan that could augur well for a more radical strategy for North Belfast. It speaks of planning a city that works for everyone, addressing long-standing social inequalities, with focus on areas blighted by 'Peace Walls' and other physical obstructions. Regeneration has to be about an inclusive city, culturally diverse, safe and welcoming to all, that includes not only such needs as affordable housing, but also better linkage of contested spaces. This involves an integrated approach to master planning, and deliberate forms of place-making that elevate the role of good urban design that raises civic pride and stewardship.

The plan emphasises the need to allocate sufficient land -- approximately 550,000 sq m over a 15 year period -- to facilitate vibrant job creation to accord with the Belfast Agenda's target of supporting 46,000 additional jobs by 2035, making for total employment of around 287,000 in 2035. This is within the context of the Belfast Agenda's aim to increase the city's population by 66,000 more people over the plan period, bringing total population to over 400,000 by 2035. This, in turn, is tied to the need for around 31,600 new homes from 2020-2035, most of which are to be accommodated within the Belfast City settlement area.

For the most part, the plan area comprises a single adjoining built up urban area, which stretches into Lisburn and Castlereagh to the south and east and Antrim and Newtownabbey to the north. A minor landscape wedge splits metropolitan Belfast from Holywood to the north east, while Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview will retain their distinctive small settlement pattern. Within the city itself, the following distinct areas are denoted:

- Belfast City Centre;
- Inner City Belfast;
- Outer Belfast;
- Belfast Harbour Estate;
- District Centres;
- Local Centres;
- City corridors; and
- Rail stations and halts.

Within each of these defined areas, thematic policies will be adopted to:

- ensure that new residential development accords with its area's character and is prioritised within a sequential system;
- provide housing of a suitable density to optimise current infrastructure and services;
- facilitate accessibility to local services, community amenities, and new job opportunities;
- provide fitting amount of retail and office uses in compliance with a hierarchy of centres;
- create better linkage between land use planning and transportation, especially sustainable forms such as walking, cycling and public transport.

So, to take some examples of how this would roll out: the low residential character of the city centre will be boosted considerably, helped in part by the re-location of Ulster University into the north of the city centre and related expansion of purpose built student residence. In addition, the city centre will house a sustainable mix of people, including families, elderly people, young

professionals etc. In turn, for good liveability, this will need quality design within a generally high density development pattern, with appropriate services and amenities to attract and keep these diverse populations.

Within the city centre, new economic and residential development will be targeted to each of four distinct areas:

- City Core;
- Innovation District;
- Mercantile District; and
- Waterfront District.

with all being connected to each other, the retail core and surrounding neighbourhoods by the green and blue infrastructure network, and high quality routes that are reachable by residents, commuters and visitors.



Above: Belfast City Centre Concept Diagram from Draft Belfast Local Development Plan 2018 Pg.55

In the surrounding inner city, the loss of traditional manufacturing has left behind brownfield industrial sites that are open for medium-high density residential development. But, this has to take account of the nearby areas of disadvantage and segregated housing areas scarred by peace walls, buffer zones, and barriers. In the short term, the most contested spaces hold scope for imaginative shared meanwhile community schemes, designed to nurture trust and confidence, within an overall social cohesion strategy.

More generally, high quality green, open, and multi-functional space, tied to a green and blue infrastructure system, will be part of a wider purpose to achieve connectivity between residential and employment locations that are serviced by diverse sustainable travel modes designed to promote active lifestyles, decrease air pollution, and facilitate good health and well-being. Achieving this strategy

‘... means considering how all communities may be affected by a development and ensuring that proposals help to improve community cohesion, fostering social integration, reducing isolation and improving access to opportunities in the city. Provision of good quality shared social and community infrastructure is critical for social cohesion and contributes to the creation of lifetime neighbourhoods. These are places where diverse groups of people are able to live and work in a safe, healthy and inclusive environment, with good connectivity to the city centre, which is the economic and social hub for shared community activity’. p. 37

Such a compact city approach demands redress of the current broken connectivity between the city centre and neighbourhoods, attributable in great part to an overbearing road network and ill-designed housing areas. This involves creating a walkable city with much more mixed use development sited adjacent to current and planned public transport corridors such as the Belfast Rapid Transit routes.

Housing is critical, involving: appropriate land supply; compact urban form; city centre residential population, alongside mixed use developments; higher density and quality development; protection of small settlements and rural area from

urban development pressures; achieving right housing supply, including affordable housing, in response to changing housing need; proactively facilitating creation of balanced local communities in terms of mix of house types, sizes and tenures, within mixed tenure housing developments; elevating the role of housing in regeneration of disadvantaged areas; and, in general, fostering inclusive and cohesive communities for people from all circumstances.

So, the policy prioritises brownfield land within current urban footprint; sets minimum target of 20% of units as affordable housing ‘pepper potted’ and ‘tenure blind’ within mixed tenure development; emphasises need to enhance opportunities for shared communities; understands provision within a context of Belfast’s ageing population, reduced household size, and declining number of households with children; promotes good urban design policies that respect and improve distinctive area character; and demands development lay-outs that show positive connection between the built form, spaces between buildings, streets and public space, and offers a public realm that accommodates seating, signage, bins, lighting, trees and landscaping.

For large developments, this approach will involve masterplanning for a holistic and comprehensive outcome, with a community cohesion agenda central for the purpose of achieving authentic shared space. Within this planning, the purpose, orientation, scale, quality, and maintenance of communal open space, together with well-designed formal and informal child play facilities have to be clearly designated. Properly planned roads that facilitate permeability and access are also essential.



Above: Challenges and Opportunities of Urban Design in Belfast

The Belfast Plan sets the following targets:

Net Additional dwellings 2020-2035



Belfast city

	2020-2025	2026-2030	2031-2035	Total
Belfast City Centre:	1,600	2,800	3,600	8,000
Belfast Harbour Estate:	600	1,300	1,600	3,500
Rest of Belfast City:	3,600	6,400	8,100	18,100
Belfast City Total	5,800	10,500	13,300	29,600

While we consider that there is much to recommend these ideas -- and they are certainly a big improvement on previous efforts in these regards --- there is a gap in terms of absence of a convincing economic plan to underpin the development ambitions. Moreover the key will be the means and monitoring of their actual implementation, and to what extent there will be a strict operation of development control to ensure compliance with these objectives.



Final Thoughts

Of all the ideas and suggestions offered here, three challenges stand out for ongoing consideration by all the stakeholders involved:

1. How do we get North Belfast more connected -- within itself, within the wider city-region, and indeed within the wider world -- to get beyond all narrow sense of territory and religious/national identities?
2. How do we achieve a united leadership amidst the division in North Belfast, around a development agenda based on need and opportunity rather than on sectarian advantage?
3. How do we tap into the resources -- both financial and social capital -- demanded by the scale and duration of the area's problems and the potential of its better future?

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