



Belfast City Council response to Inner North Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership's Action plan (2007)

Background

The Inner North Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership was established in late 2004 through informed meetings between representatives of the Greater New Lodge Community Empowerment Partnership and Lower North Belfast Community Council, this was further supplemented in April 2006 with the addition of Mount Vernon.

The area covers the following areas – Carrick Hill, Newington, Duncairn, New Lodge, Mount Collyer, Gainsborough Grove, Northwood, Mount Vernon, and Shore Crescent. Their draft vision statement was completed in September 2005 and later updated to reflect issues within Mount Vernon in 2006.

The purpose of the Inner North Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership is two-fold:

1. To convince key statutory agencies involved in the delivery of public services to make whatever investment necessary to raise the quality of impact and service delivery for the residents of Inner North.
2. In co-operation with key stakeholders, to pro-actively develop innovative new strategies and programmes across the strategic priorities that will contribute to neighbourhood regeneration.

A key requirement of each Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership is to develop an Action Plan. Inner North's plan focuses on four strategic themes.

Community Renewal – To develop confident communities that are able and committed to improving quality of life in their areas.

Physical Renewal – To help create attractive, safe, sustainable Environments in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

Social Renewal – To enhance and support youth services within Inner North and to enhance good relations within Inner North.

Economic Renewal – To improve the employment skills of local people through quality training and education and to support and develop start-up and existing local businesses and new and emerging social enterprises within Inner North.

The council's input

A number of discreet actions in the plan identify Belfast City Council as either a lead or supporting partner in their delivery.

As part of their consultation process the Inner North Partnership have now asked the council to make an official response to the actions.

Detailed below are each of these council-related actions and a combined council response (established after discussions with the council's departments).

Belfast: The Masterplan 2004 to 2020

In its masterplan for the city, published in 2004, the council carried out a careful analysis of the social, economic and physical needs of the city and proposed a framework for the revival of Belfast in the period up to 2020. Within the plan five areas, including north

Belfast, were identified for particular attention regarding neighbourhood renewal that was integrated with the strategic citywide framework. In many ways this framework complements the Inner North Action plan and can offer a significant contribution to the plan's development.

Specific detail on the north included a focus on the importance of the area's arterial routes and their role as important visual and functional gateways between the city-centre and the city sector.

Other actions included:

- Identification of vacant, derelict and under utilised land along Carlisle Circus/Clifton Street, lower Antrim Road, Shore Road, North Queen Street, Shore Road and York Street.
- The clarification of sites and development opportunities that could contribute to city-sector renewal and improved linkages with the centre-city. Opportunities identified included the North Foreshore, Cathedral Quarter, Crumlin Road Courthouse and Gaol complex, potential expansion of enterprise activities at Duncairn Gardens and Brookfield and Rosemount Mills, and commercial enterprises on Hillview/ Crumlin Roads.
- Former industrial sites and underutilised land on the Shore Road and York Road offer close proximity to the Port of Belfast and excellent access to strategic transport infrastructure (road, rail and sea). These should be examined for their potential to accommodate small businesses and incubator port/distribution related activities.
- Action should be taken to recognise the economic, social, physical, and cultural differences that have contributed to the breakdown in urban form in the north and seek to identify uses that are acceptable in such locations. This approach is not intended to be a universal solution for every 'shatterzone' throughout the sector, but it should be adopted on significant sized parcels of land and at primary gateways with the Shankill sector.

Contact

For more information on the council's approach area-based working and its neighbourhood renewal activity contact:

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Strategic Theme: Community Renewal

Desired outcome: Inner North NRA is made up of communities that are confident, involved, capable of delivering positive change and able to cooperate

Action sought: **Capacity Building Programme for specified neighbourhoods based on 'action learning' principles and best practice**

Lead **Belfast City Council (Community & Leisure Services), DSD (BRO/VCU and Community Action Unit)**

Support: CEPs

Council response: Our community services section is currently being re-organised with a commitment to 'sustainable communities' as one of its likely core functions. There are therefore opportunities for Community Services to work with the NRP on relevant pilot projects that can address capacity building within the Inner North area.

The council can work with Inner North on issues around support for capacity building; to clarify what is required and to identify possible pilot areas. This would have to be carried out on a partnership basis with NBCAU, LNBCC and the Ashton Centre.

The council would also be keen to encourage mentoring between areas of poor capacity within Inner North and areas of better capacity elsewhere in the city.

The council's work on sustainable communities extends beyond the work of Community Services. For example, our Parks and Cemeteries Service are eager, through its community outreach worker, to develop links with local communities on the regeneration and renewal potential of open space.

Desired outcome: An effective, high quality community development programme in place across Inner North with shared targets and networking built in.

Action sought: **Initially - independent research to include an 'audit' of existing posts (including statutory provision through the Council), funding sources, role and work being undertaken. Recommendations of audit acted upon.**

Lead **DSD, Belfast City Council**

Support: CEPs, Groups with funded posts

Council responses: The council's new Strategic Neighbourhood Action Programme (SNAP) team are about to carry out a 'neighbourhood services' audit that will map services provided by organisations at neighbourhood level and will share these findings with Inner North when they are published (late Autumn 2007). However, the council will be

limited in its ability to audit community posts as requested as this may be more appropriate work for funding bodies.

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| Desired outcome: | Events arranged that develop safe and accessible use of public spaces. Increased usage of existing green space & visitors attracted into Inner North |
| Action sought: | 'Friends of Alexandra Park' committee established with a view to enhancing usage, ensuring safety and organising and managing an annual festival that attracts people from Inner North and the wider city. Support the work of New Park in developing cross community sports activities - with cross community |
| Lead | Belfast City Council & DCAL (ACNI) |
| Support: | DSD, New Lodge CEP, Lower North Belfast Community Council, Mount Vernon Community Development Forum, New Park Committee (and other local groups identified by the main partners) Private Sector |

Council responses: Our Parks and Cemeteries Service are eager to work with Inner North to expand the opportunities presented by parks and other open space in the area to contribute to the wider renewal work beyond the traditional projects associated with open space.

Parks and Cemeteries Service will work with local community groups to seek to improve, protect and promote the provision of open space in Inner North which is accessible to all. At all time the council must function within physical, human and financial constraints. Parks have an outreach worker available to facilitate such work.

As an example, as part of the council's Open Space strategy, Parks have already lodged an expression of interest under PEACE III regarding a project to physical link the Waterworks, Alexander Park, the proposed Giant's Park and Grove Playing Fields – and perhaps onwards to Cavehill.

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| Desired outcome: | Programmes and policies are connected, with cooperation across key statutory agencies |
| Action sought: | BRO and Community Action Unit to ensure greater synergy between the CEP network and NR in North Belfast and specifically in Inner North |
| Lead | DSD (NRU, BRO and Community Action Unit) |
| Support: | CEPs, Belfast City Council |

Council responses: The council's new Strategic Neighbourhood Action Programme (SNAP) team are putting in place the mechanisms that will allow the council to work with Inner North and other community and statutory partners in a much more strategic and joined-up fashion. SNAP will create a conduit between Inner North and the council's various services.

A SNAP neighbourhood services audit will map the linkages between service deliveries on the ground. The results of this work could contribute to achieving the action sought.

The council's SNAP team are available to meet with Inner North to explore areas of co-operation.

Strategic Theme: Physical Renewal

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| Desired outcome: | Attractive & safe green spaces accessible to local communities and residents from outside the NRA |
| Action sought: | Greenway project - Corridor links between parks and natural areas creating a network of urban open space |
| Lead | Belfast City Council (BMAP) |
| Support: | DSD, CEPS, Groundwork |

Council response: The council recognises the importance that open space can play in the renewal process and has placed great emphasis on this in its Open Space strategy. In relation to Inner North, the strategy highlights the importance of creating a gateway into the city centre from the north – not only to improve physical access to open space but to make a positive contribution towards the creation of shared space. It also maps out the potential of joining areas of open space across north Belfast.

Our Parks and Cemeteries Service have lodged an expression of interest under PEACE II regarding a project to link up the Waterworks, Alexander Park, Grove Playing Fields, the proposed Giant's Park – and perhaps onwards to Cavehill.

They are keen to work with the NRP on developing renewal projects which utilize open space assets.

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| Desired outcome: | Arterial routes attractive and vibrant, enhancing connectivity between Inner North and the rest of the city |
| Action sought: | Extension of Arterial Routes programme |
| Lead | Belfast City Council |
| Support: | DSD, BAPs, (Belfast Area Partnerships), Inner North Physical Renewal Working Group |

Council responses: For a number of years the council has supported the concept of physical renewal projects which support of the re- invigoration of local business and communities along the city's arterial routes.

In co-operation with our partners and with funding from URBAN II and more recently IDF, our Renewing the Routes project has been involved in a number of innovative projects in Inner North (with work currently being completed on projects on Antrim Road, York Road and North Queen Street).

However, this year will see the completion of all remaining projects funded by the council and Urban II (although there may be potential for some limited additional spend funded by Urban II – in response to N+2 pressures). IDF-funded work will continue through to 2009 on Crumlin Road. Existing projects have all been underpinned by a closely researched rationale.

While the council is keen to explore the possibilities of similar work along other routes projects would be dependent on the availability of funding both for staffing and for implementation.

The council continues to work in partnership with Groundwork NI and the Housing Executive on the community-led environmental improvement 'Greencare' project. Greencare III is currently being reviewed with the potential for future enhancement.

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| Desired outcome: | More attractive neighbourhoods which people are proud of |
| Action sought: | Community arts and environmental programmes |
| Lead | DCAL (ACNI) and DSD (VCU, BRO and Community Action Unit) |
| Support: | CEPs, Belfast City Council , Groundwork |

Council response: The council has been an advocate for the importance of public art to the renewal agenda and the role of the local community in delivering projects. Through the Renewing the Routes initiative several projects have been developed in Inner North including Circus and York Road Mural. Other completed projects on Crumlin Road and York Road. These have been an externally funded aspect of the initiative. Our Peace III proposal included some consideration of Public Art subject to consultations.

As part of a Development and Outreach programme, the council's culture and arts unit would be keen to work with the Partnership in exploring opportunities for such projects and their contribution to renewal. For example, the development of a Belfast Public Art strategy with a local dimension could help guide future involvement in this type of activity.

The council's Parks and Cemeteries Service, through our Open Space strategy, also play an important role of supporting community arts. The department's Cultural Officer is supporting several initiatives in north Belfast. Parks are currently supporting a 'Treeline links' initiative to create more attractive neighbourhoods.

The council continues to work in partnership with Groundwork NI and the Housing Executive on the community-led environmental improvement 'Greencare' project. Greencare III is currently being reviewed with the potential for future enhancement.

Desired outcome: Graffiti and rubbish/debris removed quickly and repeatedly if necessary

Action sought: **Zero tolerance graffiti programme across Inner North**

Lead: **Belfast City Council**, Roads Service, NIHE

Support: CEPs, Arts Council, (Re-imagining communities?)

Council responses: Representatives from the Council's Cleansing Services, Community Awareness, Enforcement and operational teams service are available to meet with Inner North to provide a full picture of current activities and to discuss support in the future.

There are technical and legal issues around the removal of graffiti which the council can discuss with the Partnership.

The Council's North Belfast Cleansing Forum holds quarterly meetings as a way for community groups and individuals to work with Cleansing Services and we encourage the Partnership to join the forum.

Cleansing offers a range of community engagement activities from community talks, workshops, youth activities (eg) summer schemes and school workshops and visits alongside specific community focused anti-litter projects.

Since January 2007 our Community Awareness Team have facilitated cleanups in Inner North involving Greater Newlodge CEP. Over the coming weeks we are also facilitated Streetreach cleanups across the city including Newlodge and Tiger's Bay areas. The Team also visits schools promoting the anti-litter message. Since January 2007 we have visited Star of the Sea Primary School, Holy Family Primary School and Holy Family Nursery School.

The council's citywide Safer Neighbourhoods pilot project – which includes work in north Belfast – is also tackling the issue of graffiti. It would be useful for Inner North to participate in the project.

The council also manage a Roaming Wardens Project in which a team of wardens are allocated to appropriate areas across the city (on a temporary basis) through consultation with various partners. These wardens can act as a mechanism for the reporting of anti-social behaviour including graffiti.

Desired outcome: More space developed for the provision of community services

Action sought: **Greater accessibility of community services in North Belfast**

Lead: **Belfast City Council**

Support: DSD, DETI, Urban II, BiC, IFI, CEP's

Council response: Our community services section is currently being re-organised and a new community support strategy is in development that will establish priorities for the next four years. Community Services would welcome input from the Partnership including contributions to stakeholder consultation from November 2007.

As already noted the council's new SNAP team have been charged with developing opportunities for better and more creative linkages between the community and the council and see the Partnership as a key player in this role within Inner North. The team would be keen to discuss, alongside our Planning and Transport team, the usefulness of auditing community service accessibility.

Desired outcome: Creation of accessible, safe public spaces and services that are shared by communities

Action sought: **Potential for development of a 'creative cluster' investigated with location in Inner North (potentially Duncairn Gardens)**

Lead DCAL

Support: **Belfast City Council** (through Integrated Cultural Strategy), Community Arts Forum, Invest NI

Council response: The concept of 'creative clusters' is a strand within the council's local economic development plan for the city and the work of our creative industries officer within the Economic Development team has been about nurturing this potential and the opportunities it presents.

Our Officer can work with the Partnership to investigate the issues and opportunities within Inner North and offer support on developing relationships with statutory bodies and in looking at the feasibility of creative clusters in that area.

Our Culture and Arts unit have guided the creation of a new integrated cultural strategy for the city – a strategy that recognises the contribution can play to the local economy. Our culture and arts team can work with the Partnership to explore the opportunities offered by the strategy.

Strategic Theme: Social Renewal

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| Desired outcome: | Reduction of community tensions, Reduction of community conflict, Enhanced relationships across Inner North |
| Action sought: | Develop a 'Shared Future Plan' for Inner North; Inner North input to the North Belfast Good Relations Strategy |
| Lead | North Belfast Community Action Unit |
| Support: | Belfast City Council (Good Relations Unit), CRC, Belfast Interface project, IFI Community Bridges, Inner North NRP |

Council responses: The council, through its Good Relations unit, is involved in several initiatives and programmes in support of good relations in the area and the unit are available to explore joint action with the Partnership.

The unit are currently leading on projects such as the Re-Imaging Communities programme and the Bonfire Management pilot programme and are keen to discuss future involvement by the Partnership. They also support the work of local CEPs, NBCTF and other local groups and are available to engage on opportunities in developing good practice in community engagement processes

The unit can also offer information on our Good Relations Grant Aid programme and the local work and representation of the Good Relations Steering Panel.

The council's Parks and Cemeteries Service are also actively engaged in work, particularly with NBCTF, on interface issues and are available to discuss contributions from the Partnership.

Strategic Theme: Economic Renewal

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| Desired outcome: | An attractive physical environment |
| Action sought: | Expansion of the Arterial Routes programme |
| Lead | Belfast City Council |
| Support: | North Belfast Partnership, Ashton Centre, LNBCC |

Council response: As has already been noted, the council has actively supported the concept of physical renewal projects which enhance the re-invigoration of local business and communities along the city's arterial routes.

However, much the Renewing the Routes programme is already in place or reaching a final stage of work – due to the end of funding streams – although a number of already agreed projects are on-going under IDF funding.

As yet there are no additional resources in place so while the council is keen to explore the possibilities of similar work along other routes, projects would be dependant on the availability of funding both for staffing and for implementation.

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| Desired outcome: | A strong, vibrant local economy. Area based interventions including delivery of a 'Mainstreet' type programme |
| Action sought: | A programme in place |
| Lead | Belfast City Council and DSD |
| Support: | BITC, LNBCC, Ashton Centre, North Belfast Partnership |

Council response: The council has carried out some initial research with the University of Ulster on developing a BIDS concept in Northern Ireland, particularly within Belfast and the recommendations from this research can be made available to the Partnership. It should be noted that the legislation for a BIDS project is not yet in place for Northern Ireland. An alternative option would be to encourage local traders to form a self-managed forum instead.

The council is aware of Mainstream USA projects (www.mainstreet.org –including Barracks Row in Washington DC) and are keen to support the 'bottom-up' local economic ethic promoted by the approach. Our economic development team have carried out a citywide business needs analysis and can feedback on local inner north issues that may have emerged from this.

The council would also suggest participation in our Independent Retail Business Development programme. Depending on funding availability, a local independent retail programme could also be delivered.

Desired outcome: People from Inner North benefit directly through regeneration activity. Potential for local area agreements to be investigated

Action sought: **Inner North needs to ensure it is part of programmes already in place with resources aligned**

Lead DSD

Support: **Belfast City Council**, North Belfast Partnership

Council response: Local employment initiatives have been a key component of the council's current and previous economic development strategies. Key examples of this have been support for the Belfast GEMS project which was linked to the Gasworks and more recently the LEAP initiative in north Belfast.

The council has input on many of the developments noted (particularly the North Foreshore) and will be keen to work with the Partnership to ensure that barriers – physical, educational and economic are reduced for the local community in north Belfast.

Desired outcome: Structures, programme or particular projects developed in conjunction with Belfast City Council

Action sought: **Inner North seek input / manage the feasibility study for the North Foreshore community facility**

Lead **Belfast City Council**

Support: Inner North NRP

Council response: The council is investing much effort and resources into the development of the north foreshore including the environment business park and the proposed 'Giant's Park' and are keen to see its benefits being felt across the city – but in particular within communities in north Belfast.

As with its Gasworks project, the council is committed to working with local communities to ensure that there is good access to north foreshore opportunities. We will work with the Partnership to ensure this and will work local employment matching initiatives emerging from north foreshore developments.