



## 1 Background

[REDACTED] supports the development of a confident co-ordinated community sector in East Belfast.

[REDACTED] It is representative of a broad range of interests and needs within communities and encompasses a variety of groups, including local residents' associations, faith based organisations, sports clubs, older people's projects and women's groups.

[REDACTED] We seek to support successful community development, encourage reflective practice and promote cooperation and locally based solutions. Alongside the Belfast Agenda, Belfast's first community plan, the Local Development Plan (LDP) will help shape the future development of Belfast. The Local Development Plan vision is aligned to the Belfast Agenda.

[REDACTED] participated fully in the "Belfast Conversation" and "Belfast Agenda" consultation exercises – [REDACTED]

Based on the overall themes and responses received throughout the East Belfast agenda process, the following recommendations have been developed for consideration by Belfast City Council and all other stakeholders.

- [REDACTED] *in order that real honest conversations can take place to plan strategically for the future socially, culturally, environmentally and economically.*
- *Support existing community programmes that work. Consistency of services is important for stability.*
- *A renewed focus on community development principles.*
- *Prioritise voice and role of young people in all strategic community planning.*
- *Create an [REDACTED] anti-poverty, pro-opportunity task force.*
- *Support sensible tailored training leading to sustainable jobs.*
- *Increase coordination between churches and communities.*
- *Commit to the challenge of building relationships in the midst of change.*

[REDACTED] acknowledges that the size and scale of the development envisaged through the Local Development Plan could result in a truly transformative programme that could ensure that the City is able to compete with cities around the world, to attract investment and create new opportunities and ensure that the next generation commits their future to a renewed Belfast.

## 2 Responding to the Local Development Plan

[REDACTED]

The content of this response is largely drawn from these conversations, and comments on each of the four strategic aims in turn before closing with some general observations.

### 3 Shaping a Liveable Place

In East Belfast there are some examples of shaping a liveable place. The Connswater Community Greenway is now complete, having created a new linear park and reinvigorated civic space across the East, helping to improve conditions for living here. There is also a range of health and wellbeing programmes being delivered in East Belfast aiming to reduce health inequalities. Interface challenges are also being addressed through inter-agency working with communities most affected.

██████████ welcomes the acknowledgement of improved community safety and calls on Belfast City Council to continue to support East Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership to deliver on its strategic plan. The promotion of integration and community cohesion is also welcome but this must be evidenced through tangible, outcomes-focussed, community-driven programmes of support.

██████████ notes the lack of detail relating to the physical regeneration of local neighbourhoods and the issues surrounding dereliction, cleared and undeveloped sites, as well as blocked-up and decaying non-residential properties. Belfast City Council should take the lead in shaping a liveable place for all residents.

Given that five of the ten most deprived super output areas in Northern Ireland are in Belfast, our city must do more to enhance a liveable place for the most challenged neighbourhoods.

The aim to build enough homes of the right size and type is to be welcomed but who for and where? Belfast City Council must navigate the tension between the ever-increasing social housing waiting list and wanting to attract a new social and economic profile to the city.

The potential of shaping a liveable place will only be realised if the ambition of the Plan, expressed through new physical developments, is underpinned by a new vision for how people live together and share space<sup>1</sup>. It is notable that the Plan does not specifically address this and therefore does not contain any plan as to how it will tackle this significant and historical challenge.

### 4 Creating a Vibrant Economy

A vibrant economy should thrive alongside a vibrant civil economy. A more civil economy seeks more equitable prosperity and economic stability. The Carnegie Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland identified the following characteristics of a more civil economy:

- *It is open and pluralist, welcoming entrepreneurship and innovation. Whether financial or social, through traditional company or other structures, including mutuals and social enterprise.*

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<sup>1</sup> Preamble by Professor Ted Cantle CBE in Presentation to Shared City Partnership on the Local Development Plan, 10 September 2018

- *Economic actors are clear about their responsibilities and accountable to their owners, but have due regard for other stakeholders, including communities and workers, and for the environment.*
- *The success of the economy is not measured in terms of short-term economic growth or financial gains, but in terms of the sustainable well-being of current generations<sup>2</sup>.*

Sustainable economic growth for the city need to foster these characteristics. If the city centre is to be the economic heart of the city, it's important that an artificial economic bubble is not created there to the detriment of the surrounding neighbourhoods. In addition, private sector developments in the inner city often result in little employment for residents but significant environmental problems (such as parking). Furthermore, there is often a decrease in the types and suitability of schemes and support that help people from disadvantaged backgrounds gain decent jobs.

There is a risk that outside investors may take more than they put in and, in the process of accommodating them, what is indigenous, local and multidimensional gets squeezed out. Specific efforts are needed to ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalised people are given priority, otherwise it is likely that only those who are already prosperous will benefit.

## **5 A Smart, Connected and Resilient Place**

East Belfast is very well connected to services yet its two neighbourhood renewal areas (Inner East Belfast and Tullycarnet) still score highly in multiple measures relating to health inequality, educations/skills/training, and living environment – which suggests that physical connectivity can be a limited indicator of deprivation. It is also a limited indicator of community cohesion.

Belfast City Council should consider further supporting connectivity through the benefits of community development, youth work, and family support.

Belfast's most resilient resource is its citizens. Any new infrastructure should be matched by enhanced environmental quality and protect citizens from materially harmful development.

██████████ welcomes the efficient movement of people through a high quality transportation system but many inner-city neighbourhoods are currently blighted by the side-effects of this such as increased health risk due to carbon emissions, and on-street commuter parking causing access issues for local residents.

## **6 A Green and Active Place**

██████████ welcomes the aim of ensuring land availability for physical activity. East Belfast is experiencing the benefit of connected green spaces and flood alleviation schemes through Connswater Community Greenway

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<sup>2</sup> p41, Carnegie UK Trust, "Making Good Society: Final Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the Uk and Ireland." (2010)

## **7 General Comments**

Community Planning is defined in The Local Government (NI) Act 2014, Part 10 (66) as a process where Councils and their Community Planning Partners: Identify long term objectives to improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of a district (including promoting equality of opportunity, tackling poverty, exclusion and disadvantage).

While the plan is primarily focussed on physical development, it is still disappointing that there is little mention of tackling poverty, exclusion, disadvantage, and supporting good relations. Despite considerable progress, Belfast remains a deeply divided city with high levels of deprivation.

██████ believes that the Belfast Agenda and the Local Development plan should be underpinned by robust good relations and community development strategies. It is encouraging that a draft Good Relations Strategy will soon be released for consultation. However the Council's Community Development Strategy expired in 2015 and this should be addressed.

The consultation and engagement process for Local Development Plan from Belfast City Council has been limited in its outreach. There was one formal consultation event in East Belfast that was poorly attended. Future consultations relating to the outworking of the plan eg. the Local Policies Plan should consider working more closely with community networking agencies and other groups in receipt of capacity-building funding from the council – to maximise engagement.

Belfast City Council's Community Development Strategy (2012-2015) outlines a shared model of community development based on four strands:

- 1) Supporting core community development work;
- 2) Engagement that works;
- 3) Building effective partnerships;
- 4) Shared service design and delivery.

The Department of the Environment's statutory guidance for community planning names the statutory partners that are required to participate in community planning. It only states that the council must seek participation and views from representative of voluntary bodies and the wider community. If the Belfast Agenda through the Local Development Plan is serious about making real improvements for citizens, Belfast City Council should consider re-drafting a new community development strategy that links these strands to wider community planning.

The general "Power of Competence" which enables councils to develop innovative approaches to addressing issues in their area should be used by Belfast City Council to add value to the Local Development Plan by embedding community development and good relations principles.

## **8 Conclusion**

East Belfast embodies in microcosm many of the challenges faced by the Belfast Agenda and Local Development Plan. It is increasingly diverse, while struggling with the impact of division. It has produced many of the city's most creative and innovative people in the

