



Report on

**Neighbourhood Renewal
Workshop**

Held on

Wednesday 7th June 2006

at

N I C V A

Prepared by

Staff from North Belfast Partnership in collaboration with

Dr. Brendan Murtagh and Dr. Julie Harrison

The opinions expressed in this report represent the viewpoints of the workshop participants, and are not necessarily those of the authors or that of North Belfast Partnership.

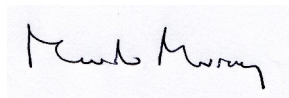
Foreword

North Belfast Partnership was pleased to host a half-day workshop that examined many of the key issues relating to the implementation of the Neighbourhood Renewal strategy in general and in North Belfast in particular.

The workshop discussions highlighted many of the concerns around the practical workings and implications of the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal strategy. Many of these concerns revolve around relationships between Government agencies and the community and voluntary sector. Neighbourhood Renewal is designed to promote closer and more effective working relationships, from strategic and policy levels to resource allocations, between statutory service providers and local communities. If Neighbourhood Renewal is to be a success in the long-term, Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships must be representative of local communities in total and seek to address the key challenges of economic, social, physical and community regeneration – in collaboration with Government agencies of all kinds and at all levels.

This report records some of the key challenges facing the various stakeholders involved in the emerging Neighbourhood Renewal process. While some of these challenges are specific to the landscape of North Belfast, others are of relevance to Neighbourhood Partnerships across Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland. The workshop did not aspire to provide answers to the difficulties and challenges of Neighbourhood Renewal, but it is intended to focus the minds of all those involved in the management and delivery of implementation.

On behalf of North Belfast Partnership I thank the workshop facilitators – Dr Brendan Murtagh and Dr Julie Harrison – and my colleagues in North Belfast Partnership in the planning, delivery and recording of the workshop.



Murdo Murray
Chief Executive
North Belfast Partnership

October 2006.

1. Introduction

The workshop began with a PowerPoint slide presentation¹ by Dr Brendan Murtagh, outlining the background to the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal policy. Brendan highlighted the main challenges that Neighbourhood Renewal presents if it is to have a significant impact on urban regeneration and renewal.

One of the challenges for North Belfast is that 'Partnership' structure has been weak at area-based level in North Belfast. Therefore, Neighbourhood Renewal presents a major challenge, as it requires the development of effective Partnerships that make a positive impact.

By implication, Neighbourhood Renewal areas reflect past market failure. In many cases they also demonstrate the symptoms of physical blight, so there are common themes that go beyond the geography of individual Partnership areas.

The DSD policy document '*People and Place: A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*', highlights four themes to renewal: economic, social, community, and physical. A key issue to be addressed is where to make a start with a strategy of renewal. Brendan offered the suggestion that physical renewal could be the initial priority. With property prices increasing across North Belfast, future physical development will be focused more on brownfield sites. The Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) outlines that seventy percent of future building development should be on brownfield sites. Private developers will therefore increasingly look to invest in the redevelopment of these sites. Another key issue will be how to connect local physical regeneration with wider economic regeneration in the north of the city and across the rest of the city. There is a need to ensure that neighbourhood renewal plans 'fit' with other strategies and long-term programmes.

It was also highlighted that there is a 'spatial and skills mismatch' in neighbourhood renewal areas. Many of the economically active population are not benefiting from the upturn in the citywide economy. There is a lack of appropriate skills to avail of many job opportunities. The other challenge is how to engage more of the economically inactive in the labour market. It can be argued that if Neighbourhood Renewal does not lead to a significant decrease in the numbers of economically inactive, then the strategy will struggle to make a positive impact upon the overall quality of people's lives. It was suggested that some neighbourhood areas are becoming 'residualised' with a prevailing culture of fatalism. Connecting these neighbourhoods to the opportunities of the wider economy is a major challenge.

If Neighbourhood Renewal is to be effectively implemented, there is a need to embed the necessary skills, knowledge and systems to deliver the strategy 'on the ground'. Community development skills alone will not be enough. Physical regeneration expertise will become an important attribute under Neighbourhood Renewal, as will clear

¹ Dr Murtagh's presentation can be accessed on North Belfast Partnership's website – www.nthbp.org

connections between a range of stakeholders that can bring resources or expertise to the process. Partnerships need to address this in their make-up and ongoing development.

Brendan outlined three key themes around the process of Neighbourhood Renewal:

- **Strategy and Planning**
The style and mechanism of strategic planning and how this should be operationalised.
- **Partnership Working**
Issues of governance, community consultation and accountability, and the challenges of joint working between community and statutory agencies.
- **Skills and Systems**
The skills required of Partnership members and/or staff, together with systems and procedures for accountability.

The workshop reviewed these key issues around the following themes:

- Strategic Planning;
- Community Consultation and Governance;
- Skills, Systems and Procedures.

The three workshop groups addressed a number of questions set around these themes.

2. Strategic Planning

- What are the critical issues that you feel should be developed in the context of Neighbourhood Renewal, especially in terms of the balance between the four objectives and the suggested approach to programme integration?
- Do you think that it is right to emphasise brownfield development and an interface policy approach?
- How do you think the economic development and labour market agenda is best taken forward?

The following are some of the key issues emanating from group discussions:

- 2.1 A major challenge will be how to operationalise the thematic strategies under Neighbourhood Renewal. Four Neighbourhood Partnerships in North Belfast collaborating on economic development programmes was raised as a possible mechanism of implementation. It was also acknowledged that strategic planning is difficult if local residents are not engaged in the process and there is limited community planning capacity;
- 2.2 There was discussion following Brendan's suggestion that physical renewal could be a priority for Neighbourhood Renewal in the initial years. Brownfield sites can be developed for a variety of purposes. Mixed housing developments are one possibility of physically regenerating an area, although it was recognised that BMAP sets certain restrictions on urban planning. It can be argued that the best chance of changing some of the big economic and labour market issues that impact on communities in North Belfast is through the well considered use of Neighbourhood Renewal resources for physical regeneration and improved connections with city-wide developments;
- 2.3 Concerns were raised that private property developers are land banking, which will limit opportunities for community based developments. How can Neighbourhood Partnerships influence the free market in property development? There is no legislative requirement that property developers should consult with Partnerships. 'Community gain' provisions are currently not incorporated into planning legislation in Northern Ireland. One possibility is that Neighbourhood Partnerships should foster beneficial relationships with property developers and seek to influence new build proposals through a process of voluntary consultation;
- 2.4 The private sector needs to be engaged and encouraged to become involved in the process of economic and physical regeneration. How can it be encouraged to invest in these neighbourhoods? There was a consensus that the attitudes of some employers need to be changed towards potential employees from neighbourhood renewal areas. Cases were alluded to that give support to the perception that postcode / neighbourhood 'discrimination' has an influence on job applications;
- 2.5 As a consequence of social exclusion, these neighbourhoods tend to be inward looking but it is unlikely that there will be many new jobs created in these areas, so there is a need for local residents to see job opportunities in other parts of the city. This is particularly important for those young persons entering the labour

- market. There is a challenge to the various employability programmes to effectively engage with those at the margins of the labour market in these areas. Neighbourhood Partnerships have a role to influence the workings of the various programmes and ensure that effective engagement occurs. This will require challenging initiatives to target those currently economically inactive;
- 2.6 Neighbourhood Renewal must focus on people's needs rather than wants. This is a significant challenge that requires robust information on need in local areas and ongoing review. Programmes should concentrate on how they enhance the quality of life of local residents, and make the most effective use of limited resources. There will be a need to prioritise those themes that can have a positive impact, both in the short and long term;
- 2.7 There was a clear consensus that there needs to be a co-ordinated response by the statutory agencies to Neighbourhood Renewal. It was noted that in the North West a Chief Executives Programme Group had been formed to respond to Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans in a cohesive way. This Group would meet with DSD to review policy issues and service delivery implications emanating from the various Action Plans in Derry, Omagh and Strabane. It was suggested that a similar forum could operate at a North Belfast / Belfast level. If Neighbourhood Renewal is to really influence the 'bend the spend' then such a forum would be one way of ensuring a co-ordinated approach across the statutory sector. It would also provide a tangible signal that the statutory agencies have bought into the concept of Neighbourhood Renewal. There was some concern by community representatives that statutory representatives involved on the Neighbourhood Partnerships may not be in a position to influence policy and the delivery of public services. They are currently playing a role of support and information provision.

3. Community Consultation and Governance

- What should the Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership look like in your area, given the diversity of approaches and the presence of other structures in North Belfast?
- How and on what issues should Partnerships work together?
- How do you feel the local community should be consulted and involved in the process?

The following are some of the key issues emanating from group discussions:

- 3.1 There was a general consensus that an agreed common framework of consultation would be useful for the various stakeholders involved in Neighbourhood Renewal in North Belfast. Individual Partnerships could still decide the consultation mechanisms most appropriate for their areas, in light of local needs and the different levels of community capacity;
- 3.2 Community consultation must include local residents, but avoiding a 'shopping list' outcome. Consultation with local residents must focus on those strategic interventions with the potential to ensure real impact in local neighbourhoods and on factors contributing to multiple deprivation;
- 3.3 There was discussion of the merits of the use of 'Key Issues' papers as a means of consultation across Neighbourhood Renewal areas. Some concerns were raised about getting sufficient response from the community. There were also concerns about 'consultation fatigue' in many of these communities as they have been subjected to numerous community audits, needs analyses, gap analyses, etc from previous initiatives;
- 3.4 There was recognition that the issue of 'Governance' needs more thought and attention. Processes for dealing with inevitable conflicts of interest will need to be formalised at an early stage. A *Code of Conduct* is one possible option for members of Neighbourhood Partnerships. However, there was a general consensus that Partnerships do not have to be constituted bodies. For legal reasons, statutory representatives and local elected representatives may have difficulties regarding membership of a constituted body. Partnerships may be best viewed as a 'coalition of interests' that adopt a strategic approach to delivering change in local areas;
- 3.5 The involvement of the statutory agencies is vital to the effective delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal. This, however, needs to be formalised. How best can this be actioned? Some concerns have been raised that statutory representation / commitment has been slow. This is partially due to the personality and skills of particular individuals, rather than an indication of a general approach to engagement by statutory agencies. There is also a sense that statutory agencies are having to come to terms with the possible policy and funding implications that emanate from the Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans;

- 3.6 Concerns were raised over inefficient co-ordination and possible duplication of roles between various stakeholders involved in similar regeneration work across the thematic areas. There is a need to map and agree roles of the Community Empowerment Partnerships (CEP's), North Belfast Partnership, Urban II, other community forums and the emerging Neighbourhood Partnerships;
- 3.7 In particular, the relationship between Neighbourhood Partnerships and the CEP's needs to be clarified. How should the CEP Action Plans fit into the Neighbourhood Renewal consultation process? Some CEP's have more advanced Action Plans than others. However, CEP Action Plans have been primarily based on a community development framework, and thus can only partially contribute to Neighbourhood Renewal, as the latter is meant to have broader representation and connections to wider policy agendas and programmes;
- 3.8 There was a broad review of the possible resource requirements of the Neighbourhood Partnerships. One viewpoint is that Neighbourhood Partnerships should have a dedicated staff resource. Colin Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership was seen as an example of a Partnership that had gone down this route. The argument is that staff resources are required to co-ordinate the implementation of the final Action Plan and liaise with DSD / BRO concerning financial and programme management. However, the alternative viewpoint is that there is no need to employ staff – which can be an expensive resource. This would divert financial resources from the main objective of Neighbourhood Renewal. Neighbourhood Partnerships might be best kept as a 'coalition of interests' with effective mechanisms for linking to existing structures – such as North Belfast Partnership, Belfast Area Partnerships and other forums– on shared interests;
- 3.9 There was some discussion on the use of Service Level Agreements with providers in the delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal programmes. This could be used to also avail of professional expertise from statutory, voluntary and community sector agencies. However, this may require the Partnerships to have some executive staff to monitor and manage Service Level Agreements;
- 3.10 There was discussion on how the four Neighbourhood Partnerships may share resources. A centralised secretariat was seen as one possibility, and economies of scale would support the argument for such an approach.

4. Skills, Systems and Procedures

- What core skills do you feel Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership ‘staff’ need in order to deliver a regeneration agenda in your designated area?
- What performance indicators are required to ensure that the projects and programme effects are assessed fairly and robustly?

The following are some of the key issues emanating from group discussions:

- 4.1 There was a general discussion around the types of skills required for the effective operation of Neighbourhood Partnerships. While sectoral representation is important, it was agreed that the skills that members brought to the forum was of more importance to the success of Neighbourhood Partnerships. A number of skills were viewed as particularly important. These include physical regeneration expertise and community engagement skills;
- 4.2 It was highlighted that a number of existing skills frameworks may be applicable to Neighbourhood Renewal. The Egan Review may be useful. It was also noted that the British Urban Regeneration Association (BURA) has examined the possible skills required for urban regeneration and will be developing a course in Northern Ireland (this has now been agreed and will commence in September 2006);
- 4.3 It was also noted that Tom Kiernan of DSD has undertaken some work around skills sets / competencies for Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships, based on a pilot project in the Village area in south Belfast. It is hoped that DSD would share the outcomes of this work with Neighbourhood Partnerships in due course;
- 4.4 However, it was highlighted that the skills required to effectively deliver Neighbourhood Renewal are available from a variety of sources. They exist within the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. The private commercial sector should not be overlooked, particularly in the delivery of economic and physical regeneration programmes. For example, the expertise of estate agents and property consultants could be used in physical renewal planning. It will be a case of identifying the required skills and then accessing those from the various stakeholders. Neighbourhood Partnerships need to identify any ‘skills gaps’ within their broad membership and identify how those gaps can be overcome;
- 4.5 In terms of systems and procedures, it is probably too early for Neighbourhood Partnerships to give these detailed consideration. However, it will become more critical at the implementation stage of the Action Plans. The four Partnerships in North Belfast may need to consider areas of collaboration, not only across thematic areas of renewal but also in terms of programme management. One suggestion, in keeping with previous thinking on economies of scale, was the possibility of some form of Programme Secretariat provided by North Belfast Partnership;
- 4.6 Ultimately, Neighbourhood Renewal is about having a positive impact on the local communities and improving the quality of life for those living in these areas. Improved socio-economic impacts will only be seen in the long-term.

Performance indicators will need to be agreed. These will be specific to each Neighbourhood Renewal area. It was suggested that the 'Bonding, Bridging, Linking' model of Social Capital being developed by Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI), CFNI and Mike Morrissey could be a possible tool for programme monitoring under Neighbourhood Renewal.

5. Main Issues & Conclusions

The workshop identified a number of key issues that merit further consideration:

Geography

- 5.1 Neighbourhood Renewal areas in many cases are not ‘natural’ neighbourhoods and are not always made up of contiguous places. This creates particular challenges, both at a representational level and for newly emerging Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships that are working to develop Action Plans across an area where perceptions of local need may differ.

Community Capacity

- 5.2 Within some areas, there are varied levels of community capacity and community infrastructure to engage local people in discussion about Neighbourhood Renewal. There are also differences in principle regarding the approach that should be taken to community consultation and engagement by the Partnerships. Participants asked whose role it is to close the gaps in community capacity and how this can be done within the Neighbourhood Renewal process. It was highlighted that there is a need for agreed processes and principles of community consultation within Neighbourhood Renewal, particularly in the process leading to Action Plans. It was noted that North Belfast Partnership have produced a Consultations Framework which can be the basis for a consultation strategy for each of the four Neighbourhood Partnerships in North Belfast.

Structures and Relationships

- 5.3 It was noted that Neighbourhood Renewal is an ‘overcrowded’ arena in North Belfast. North Belfast Partnership, North Belfast Community Action Unit, BRO North and other divisions within DSD, including Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, all have some role to play in the current context. There are also the CEP’s, which nominate community representatives to Neighbourhood Partnerships and currently make up a large component of these. Belfast City Council may also be entering the arena in terms of provision of technical assistance and a future role in community planning following the outworkings of the RPA;
- 5.4 There is a clear need to ensure collaboration by the various delivery agencies, improve communication and develop ways of working which avoid duplication. Individual Neighbourhood Partnerships also need to examine how they can work together on common renewal themes / programmes that require a wider approach. Individual Partnerships need to be ‘plugged in’ to broader strategies and take account of each other if Neighbourhood Renewal is to make the most of opportunities framed by city-wide policies and plans;

- 5.5 The structural relationships within and between Neighbourhood Partnerships also need to be clarified. How can statutory agencies and community organisations collaborate more effectively? How can statutory representatives operate effectively in individual Partnerships and promote a collective response that shapes service delivery within neighbourhood renewal areas?
- 5.6 There were concerns raised by community sector representatives about a perceived lack of firm direction and transparency of process by DSD. *People and Place* does highlight the localised nature of Neighbourhood Renewal to tackling the problems of multiple deprivations. There is a concern that this may allow for many different approaches to the implementation to Neighbourhood Renewal, not only in Belfast but also across Northern Ireland. This may in turn dilute the potential benefit of the programme. However, the drip-feeding of information to Neighbourhood Partnerships and associated community groups has undermined the credibility of the concept of Neighbourhood Renewal with many from the community sector (and arguably within the statutory sector as well).

Core issue

- 5.7 Wealth creation and tackling poverty may be considered a core issue for Neighbourhood Renewal. If the labour market agenda is key to greater personal and family income generation in these areas, how can wealth creation be embedded in local neighbourhoods? How can local communities benefit from economic and employment opportunities in other parts of the city?
- 5.8 The high number of interfaces in North Belfast was acknowledged as having a negative impact on local neighbourhoods and complicating the process of planning and delivery for Neighbourhood Partnerships. It was agreed that Neighbourhood Partnerships should seek ways of addressing issues around interfaces and conflict reduction;
- 5.9 Representation was thought to be vital to the successful working of a Neighbourhood Partnership. With a wide range of key stakeholders represented, there is greater potential to deliver real change. By definition, Neighbourhood Renewal areas suffer from multiple deprivations and therefore the remedies require a multi-dimensional approach by the statutory, private, community and voluntary sectors. There is work to be done to ensure that Partnerships are representative of all sectors at an appropriate level, so that improvements can be delivered in neighbourhoods and embedded in policy and service delivery. There is also the issue of ensuring that local communities are truly represented on the Neighbourhood Partnerships in a context of differential capacity and varied community infrastructure.

Appendix 1 – Participant List

Sharon Beattie	Inner North NR Partnership
Anne Bill	Upper Ardoyne / Ligoniel NR Partnership
James Edgar	North Belfast Partnership
John Fairfield	Upper Ardoyne / Ligoniel NR Partnership
Bryan Hanson	Rathcoole NR Partnership
Dale Harrison	Upper Ardoyne / Ligoniel NR Partnership
William Hutchinson	Inner North NR Partnership
Philip Magee	North Belfast Community Action Unit
Manus Maguire	Crumlin / Ardoyne NR Partnership
Ruth Moore	Crumlin / Ardoyne NR Partnership
Murdo Murray	North Belfast Partnership
Charlie Murray	BRO North
John McCorry	North Belfast Partnership
Tracey McCullough	North Belfast Partnership
Trish O’Kane	Inner North NR Partnership
Paul O’Neill	Inner North NR Partnership
Kieran O’Reilly	Upper Ardoyne / Ligoniel NR Partnership
Paul Roberts	Inner North NR Partnership
Ciaran Shannon	North Belfast Partnership

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