

T:BUC Engagement Forum

“Our Safe Community”

18 May 2021
10.30am -12.30pm
Forum held via Zoom

Contributors:

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Introduction and Welcome

Chris Stewart welcomed delegates to the 15th meeting of the T:BUC (Together: Building a United Community) Engagement Forum, noting a very positive turnout. Mr Stewart introduced himself as the Deputy Secretary of the TEO, responsible for the Strategy and Programme. He explained that he had taken over from Dr Mark Browne who had moved on to the role of Permanent Secretary in the Department of Education and asked the Forum to join in wishing Dr Browne well in his new role.

Mr Stewart advised the last meeting of the Forum had been in January where the theme had been “Delivery of T:BUC through Shared Space”, which outlined in particular the key priority of “Our Shared Space”. Today’s theme was another key priority, “Our Safe Community”, which aimed to create a community where everyone felt safe and where life choices were not inhibited by fears of safety. That was a fundamental theme of T:BUC at any time, but it resonated more in the backdrop of the recent violence and ongoing political and community tensions. The efforts of all those involved in T:BUC had never been more important, and as such, Mr Stewart wished to add his personal thanks to those who had been involved in tackling violence at flashpoints on the interfaces and diverting young people away from it. The media were always quick to report trouble, however, they were much less interested in those who took personal risks and sacrifices in order to prevent or minimise the difficulties and these individuals deserved everyone’s appreciation.

The Forum were to hear a number of presentations which would highlight the work and demonstrate what had been achieved under T:BUC so far. Before these, Mr Stewart gave a brief update on what had been happening across the board in relation to the various T:BUC headline actions. There was a long list of very impressive achievements however time did not permit doing justice or even mentioning everything that was being done, and Mr Stewart apologised in advance for anything that was left out. A few short highlights to illustrate what had been achieved were detailed demonstrating a very successful, thriving Strategy:

- Department for Communities continued to make very good progress with its Shared Housing Programme and now supported 45 Schemes, comprising 1480 units. This was a very significant and impressive achievement which vastly exceeded the initial target set in the T:BUC Strategy and showed that there was an appetite for shared housing. Mr Stewart encouraged everyone to continue working together to build upon that success.
- In Ardoyne and Ballysillan, T:BUC Ambassadors co-designed and delivered their own Good Relations Project, with the aim of helping to create the next generation of community leaders. A similar project called “Uniting Derg” was also completed which engaged young people in a range of sport, creative and good relations activities. These projects showed what could be achieved by empowered and supported communities, and the importance of co-design and co-delivery.
- Department of Education – work was progressing well on the first four projects under the “Shared Education Campus Project”. This was a landmark development and a fundamental change in the way young people experienced education. Alongside Shared Housing, Mr Stewart believed this project had huge potential to make a difference and deliver the T:BUC aims.
- In TEO, the T:BUC Camps Programme had successfully delivered 75 camps in 2021, despite the impact of Covid. This programme sought to engage young people who were at risk, reduce anti-social behaviour, reduce community tensions, and divert young people away from risk taking behaviours. This was a great example of what could be done by quickly reacting to emerging issues and putting in place the delivery needed to take ‘at risk’ young people away from disorder. Mr Stewart wished to take this opportunity to thank everyone in the Education Authority for all their work in supporting groups to deliver the camps and the planned interventions programme and, in particular, their response and their ability to use alternative methods of engagement of young people during the pandemic.
- The Good Relations Ambassadors Programme was also delivered through the T:BUC Camp Programme in 2021. The Ambassadors were involved in various aspects of the delivery of the Camps Programme, and all had received Good Relations training. Their role included engaging and inspiring other young people to make positive changes in their own lives and to inspire others in their community and Mr Stewart applauded the work they had done.
- In TEO, the Racial Equality Unit was working with the Department of Education to identify ways to tackle racist bullying in schools and, along with the Department of Justice, to develop an approach to tackle race hate crime. This work would result in making the community safer for newcomers who had made NI their home.
- Also, in TEO, the Urban Villages Initiative continued to work collaboratively with partners across a range of departments, district councils, arm’s length bodies, and with communities themselves. This work aimed to build capacity, improve the physical environment and create thriving places of safe communities. £18.5m of capital investment had been spent across the five urban village areas which had transformed the infrastructure available to local residents. One good example of this was the Grace Family Centre which opened last week, taking a previously derelict building at the Ardoyne interface in North Belfast, and providing a safe place for women to access training, advice and educational programmes.
- Lastly, the Department of Justice’s Removal of Interface Programme continued to make progress at a number of interface areas which the Forum would hear more about shortly.

Ministers' remarks

Mr Stewart advised it had been hoped at this point to be joined by Ministers to say a bit more about the Strategy. He noted they may be able to join before the end of the event, but in case they were not able to do so, Mr Stewart conveyed their apologies at this point.

However, Ministers had asked Mr Stewart to convey their appreciation for the efforts of everyone involved in T:BUC and to send their best wishes for a successful meeting of the Forum, noting they wished to join a future Forum Event.

Moving on to the substantive part of the agenda, Mr Stewart advised there would now be three very interesting presentations. Following these presentations, there would be the opportunity for a Q&A session and further discussions.

For the first of the presentations, Mr Stewart invited Michael McAvoy from Department of Justice (DOJ) to talk to the Forum about the Interface Programme.

Presentation 1: Department of Justice Interface Programme – Michael McAvoy

Mr McAvoy thanked Mr Stewart for the opportunity to contribute to the Forum on behalf of the DOJ. Mr McAvoy introduced himself as a public servant who had joined the DOJ to head up the Interface Team a few years previously. This job involved leading a small team who managed the DOJ's physical interface barriers across Northern Ireland (NI). Their aim was to seek to reduce or remove these walls where there was an appetite to do so. Another aspect of Mr McAvoy's job involved sponsoring the eleven Policing and Community Safety Partnerships which operated across NI as well as work connected to the Executive's Tackling Paramilitarism Programme. The common theme was that all these areas of work involved finding local solutions to local problems by working with local people.

For most of Mr McAvoy's career, across a number of Departments; work had involved community based economic development, tackling deprivation, community and political liaison, dealing with issues such as parades and the legacy of NI's Troubles, with work on interfaces touching on most or all of those issues. The NI Executive decided in 2013 to seek to remove all interface barriers in NI by 2023, which would not be easy within that timeframe, and that aim should be regarded as a target, not an aspiration. Taken alongside all the other actions in the T:BUC Strategy, the Executive had made a strong commitment to improve community relations and continue the journey towards a more united and shared society.

Mr McAvoy, with the aid of a Powerpoint presentation, updated on progress regarding the Executive's 10-year programme (Slide 2). The DOJ worked with all interface communities and if a decision was reached to remove a barrier, they had the practical job of removing those barriers.

Mr McAvoy explained what interface structures were, where they were and how the DOJ brought about the removal of them. He also shared some of the obstacles and challenges that the DOJ faced. He noted there were numerous Good Relations Practitioners from both community-based and the statutory sector in attendance at the Forum whose thoughts, comments, observations, constructive criticisms or helpful suggestions during the Q&A session would be most welcome.

Mr McAvoy explained that 2019 marked 50 years since the first interface structure or peace line was erected in NI. This was erected in Belfast in the form of a makeshift barrier with rows of barbed wire. This was built to separate communities as a security measure to

preserve peace and maintain order at a time when people were being killed as a result of inter-community tension and violence. Now, 52 years later, that same interface was part of a long wall stretching along the line dividing two districts, one predominantly Protestant and one predominantly Catholic in West Belfast.

In 2010, when the Police and Justice functions were transferred to the DOJ, they were given responsibility for 59 structures. The DOJ used justice and security powers to requisition land, construct, maintain and retain such structures for the continuing preservation of peace and the maintenance of order. It was important to note that legislative underpinning of interfaces was the responsibility of the DOJ and this explained why the DOJ-owned structures had differed from those owned by other organisations such as the NI Housing Executive. From the 59 interface structures the DOJ inherited, 16 had been removed, and 43 remained, with quite a number of the remaining structures having been reduced in one way or another. The Housing Executive owned a further 21 structures in 2010 of which 13 remained. All were mostly in Belfast, Derry /Londonderry and Portadown. Until recently, there was one in Lurgan but it had been removed earlier this year.

As mentioned, the DOJ had 59 interfaces which had been reduced to 43. The Belfast Interface Project (BIP) stated there were 116 different interface security barriers across NI. The explanation for this discrepancy was that the DOJ tended to cluster its interfaces in certain areas such as Duncairn Gardens, whereas BIP counted them separately. Mr McAvoy commented that some common language around this should be agreed, but that having philosophical debates seemed less important than trying to make progress on interface reduction and removal.

When considering some of the obstacles and challenges, Mr McAvoy suggested there were popular misconceptions about the DOJ's work rather than real problems. They were sometimes criticised for not having a Strategy and Work Programme for taking down interfaces or it was suggested they didn't have the budget. In terms of Strategy, in 2013 the T:BUC Strategy created a clear aspiration which was to remove or reduce all interfaces by 2023. This was as clear a Mission Statement as it could be. In 2019, the DOJ published a more detailed Interfaces Programme Framework document which set out the principles underpinning their work and the methodology used. The DOJ also had a Work Programme, but if interface reduction/ removal was going to be based on working in partnership with local communities, then frequently their plans would be strongly influenced by the pace at which those communities were happy to work.

Summing up how the DOJ undertook their work in partnership with others (slide 3), e.g. in terms of funding, to achieve interface reduction/removal, £60m was secured from the Treasury for the five-year period from April 2016 to March 2021. This was partly used to assist interface removal work and help create a shared future, in line with T:BUC Strategy. The DOJ bids for resources were based on anticipated spend for interface removal/reduction work on an annual and forward-look basis. Over recent years, the availability of viable interface reduction/removal projects was the issue more than the availability of resources. In trying to remove interface barriers, opinions were that the DOJ should have focussed on easy wins to build momentum. However, there were not that many easy wins in this line of work.

One of the key things Mr McAvoy had learned from his work in DOJ was that every interface was unique and a bespoke solution was required for barrier reduction/ removal. From a DOJ perspective, they were happy to work on that basis. However, the DOJ were not entirely in control of timescales for work on or near private development sites. Securing community consent for change informed everything the DOJ did and was a key principle that underpinned their work. Securing consent was not easy and the DOJ had been challenged by leading academics to define what constituted community consent when

removing/reducing an interface structure. This was where it became complicated and in some instances, people told them that 50% of the local population plus 1 in favour of change was good enough and constituted consent. In other experiences, everyone defended the right of one local resident to say, "No". So, devising a formula to make such calls would be problematic and cut across the idea that every interface was unique, and every solution was down to local people. In some areas, the DOJ had been told it was nothing to do with local business owners, workers or parishioners, because they didn't live there. In other areas, people were happy to factor in the views of the wider community of interest. There was no easy answer, in working with the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) groups, amongst others, the DOJ were getting a sense of where the answers might lie, lessons would be learned and used to inform how the issue of community consent was responded to in future. In short, it was about obtaining as much community consensus as possible and responding to concerns that may be raised or addressing any risks identified. As with lots of good relations work, obtaining community consent should be a process rather than an event and being able to point to real life examples was probably a better way to proceed than debating the theory of consent.

As a public servant, Mr McAvoy heard often about a lack of co-ordination across Government, or a lack of joined-up Government, and when it came to interface removal/reduction work, he believed that cross-departmental/inter-agency co-operation continued to improve.

The DOJ accepted that interface reduction/removal should not happen in isolation and substantial change would depend on measurable changes to local wellbeing including economic, social, security, education and environmental benefits. The sum total of the work done in interface areas to achieve these goals was enormous and T:BUC was only one Government Strategy and funding stream. Neighbourhood Renewal, Good Relations, Local Investment Fund, Early Intervention Transformation Programme, Social Investment Fund, Education Zones and Tackling Paramilitarism were just a number of further programmes that existed which often provided resources into interface communities. The DOJ sometimes were accused of having too much focus on barrier removal/reduction without considering the other needs of a local community around the bigger regeneration picture, but knowing what went on in an area in terms of planned physical, economic, social and community regeneration was actually the DOJ's starting point for any conversation. Central control was not the DOJ's aim, and these were complex problems that required everyone to work together to make progress.

Many of these issues existed in areas with no interfaces or inter-community tensions or trouble and the only form of co-ordination or joined-up Government that worked was the one that brought all the right people together locally to address or influence change. Some background information and the challenges highlighted were covered in the Framework document which was available online on the DOJ website.

Mr McAvoy demonstrated the successes achieved along the way, showing what interface reduction/removal could look like in practice with focus on the story of Duncairn Gardens, Crumlin Road and Serpentine Navara.

- Duncairn South, an area that experienced significant physical and demographic changes over the years (slide 4). After initial destruction during WW2, in the 1970s, inter-community and sectarian violence further demolished areas in North Belfast with bombings of premises, attacks on homes, rioting and bomb scares resulting in many of the homes being left derelict by the mid-1970s.
- Aerial photograph of Duncairn Gardens (slide 5) which demonstrated how, for the last 30 plus years, there had been a hard-edged dividing line between the Catholic,

Nationalist, Republican community in New Lodge and Protestant Loyalist community in Tiger's Bay. Both sides of Duncairn Gardens contained a series of interface structures and a total of six structures made up what was referred to as the Duncairn South interface on the New Lodge side of Duncairn Gardens.

- A Policy Response to sectarian interface violence that did not involve erecting walls was piloted by the Government along Duncairn Gardens in the 1980s/ early 1990s, through the provision of community-owned social/economy workspace and the development of an advanced factory by Invest NI (slide 6). Land was used to create a neutral zone between the two communities. After a number of difficult early years, the business centre depicted was there for local employment and business development purposes and was now fully let and thriving.
- The commercial development shown on the previous slide (6) helped to remove a significant tract of dereliction across wasteland. However, it didn't remove the interface in its entirety and the images showed a range of interface structures that stretched out along Duncairn Gardens (slide 7).
- One of the interface structures that existed along Duncairn Gardens which comprised of a 70 metre long, 7-metre-high interface fence erected in the early 1970s (slide 8). On one side, the fence overshadowed homes and on the other side it was a development site in private ownership.
- The DOJ was able to work at the location illustrated with the IFI funded Duncairn Community Partnership to develop a proposal to remove the structure and replace it with a much lower boundary wall (slide 9). With concerns remaining about security in this location, the DOJ agreed to erect a temporary 'missile stop' fence in front of the wall. Looking for community benefit was part of what the DOJ tried to do on any interface removal/reduction scheme. In this location, the removal of a very overbearing, solid structure created an opportunity for the extension of local gardens and created an overall improvement in the visual amenity of the area.
- Improvement highlighted, although a wall remained (slide 10). However, there was community benefit in terms of people not living in the shadow of that interface. The expectation was to 'future proof' the structure, so that the temporary fence could come down, while the boundary wall continued to exist, allowing the frontage of Duncairn Gardens to be restored, and the interface rendered obsolete.
- Before and after photographs (slide 11) which demonstrated the improvement made to the area providing more light, extension of gardens and a general improvement in the visual amenity of the area through that project.
- A 'before' picture with interface fence which was erected a number of years ago to prevent missiles being directed towards homes on North Queen Street (slide 12).
- Work in progress with the fence having been removed entirely and an Environment Improvement Scheme under construction (slide 13). This was an area where interface violence occurred recently but, due to the work of the Duncairn Community Partnership, that spike in violence was ended relatively quickly.
- A Scheme which was completed primarily by the NI Housing Executive on the Crumlin Road a number of years ago (slide 14). A 10ft brick wall existed before but, with the agreement of local people over time, the wall was removed and replaced by railings and environmental improvements to release a view to the church.

- A large fence on part of the Serpentine Road where historically there had been a lot of interface violence (slide 15). Work was undertaken to remove the structure (as shown). Aerial photograph showing how this section looks now, detailing a multi-use games area, play park and more open and friendly access to them and to the existing community centre (slide 16).

In conclusion, events could sometimes get in the way of the momentum that had been created towards the reduction of interface removal and paramilitary control of communities and gatekeepers who purportedly spoke for communities was a feature of the work undertaken by DOJ. Despite setbacks, there remained an overwhelming desire for positive change and this continued as work in progress. (Slides 17-18)

In terms of the work the DOJ sought to progress in interface areas, this sometimes started with their structures, but it was always about people's lives, life in interface communities and the possibilities for change. It was about young people growing up in communities separated by physical barriers and, while acknowledging that those barriers were put there to protect life and limb at a time, it was about questioning the purpose they now served and there was an appetite for change as reflected in research conducted by DOJ and University of Ulster, amongst others. From DOJ's perspective, work would continue with communities to reduce/remove interface structures, overcome inevitable obstacles, provide the resources needed to achieve the ambitions of local communities and help to deliver the change that people living in interface areas wanted to see. The interface programme existed to work towards the aspirations set out in the T:BUC Strategy around "Our Safe Community" and as interface communities succeeded in reducing, removing, reimagining, sometimes reclassifying or reconfiguring interface structures, there was no doubt they would create a community where everyone felt safe in moving around and where life choices were not inhibited by fears around safety. That was the ultimate shared goal and it was a pleasure to work with local people to achieve that aim.

Mr McAvoy thanked the Forum for listening and handed back to the Chair.

Mr Stewart thanked Mr McAvoy for a very candid and insightful presentation of what was a very challenging and important area of work, one which was clearly delivering real benefits for communities. One of the things rightly emphasised was that successful solutions and successful delivery did not come from solely top down in Government, and depended on partnership across Government, with Councils and lots of other organisations. Above all, they depended on empowering and equipping local communities to shape their own future.

Mr Stewart advised that the Forum would hear more about that in the second presentation from the Belfast Interface Project and welcomed Paul Smith and Professor Peter Bloom, who would present on the Shared Futures Community Planning Toolkit.

Presentation 2: Belfast Interface Project – Shared Futures Community Planning Toolkit – Paul Smith and Professor Peter Bloom

Mr Smyth began by expressing, on behalf of Belfast Interface Project (BIP), together with the Innovation Team at Essex University, headed by Professor Peter Bloom, and Animorph Co-Operative how excited and delighted they were to have the opportunity to present their new and innovative Shared Futures Project and Community Toolkit.

Mr Smyth introduced himself as the Project Co-ordinator at BIF and the Lead on this particular project. Shared Futures was the culmination of many years work and research carried out by BIF, working with interface communities across Belfast and with community

groups in Tullyally and Curryrierin in Derry/Londonderry. Throughout BIF's research, the main issue had always been around the question of the removal of peace walls and barriers. When asked, if they wanted to see the walls come down, most people refused to discuss the subject and, since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the number and size of security barriers had increased, without a recognised plan of action for their removal. BIF had rephrased this question and now asked, "Would you like to see the walls come down or would you like an alternative?". BIF believed this project, which they had been working on for almost three years, gave interface communities the opportunity to explore alternatives. During this period, BIF had engaged with numerous Youth and Community Groups across the City and had been to the forefront of the design and development of the Community Toolkit, which was launched recently and was available for download on Google Store in either Android or Apple format. The idea for this new and innovative project came about in 2019 when BIF's Strategic Director, Joe Donnell and Professor Peter Bloom came together to discuss the possible uses of augmented reality as a tool for community groups to communicate, co-operate and collaborate in a safe environment. It was to offer local communities the tools to help them envisage the future building possibilities for their area, whilst seeking in the short-term to remove barriers in people's minds. The long-term goal was to remove the physical and social barriers dividing interface communities. The Community Toolkit was made up of three component parts, 1) the consultant tool or website, 2) the local internet network, and 3) an augmented reality app.

Because this was where the technical part began, Mr Smyth handed over to Professor Peter Bloom who would explain the intricacies of the Toolkit in some more detail.

Professor Bloom thanked Mr Smyth and thanked the Forum for inviting them to speak. With the aid of a Powerpoint presentation, Professor Bloom continued by asking the question, "What is Shared Futures?". In a sentence, it was a first of its kind, a community democracy in future planning toolkit. It worked to give communities the voice and ability to work together to create their own shared futures. At its heart, this was about creating something that was community led and people driven. It was designed in consultation and co-developed with interface community members and leaders.

Professor Bloom shared a short video developed with some interface community members which presented the ethos of the project and gave a short glimpse of the Toolkit.

As mentioned by Mr Smyth, Professor Bloom referred to the three component parts:

1. Explore Tool (Local Enterprise Network) – A Wi-Fi network created with community leaders in interface areas, allowing them to have a tool for cross-community collaboration.
2. Propose Tool (Public Online Consultation Tool) – Currently located in Limestone Road/Alexander Park, this was an innovative tool which allowed community members to propose ideas/collaborate/improve for shared areas in communities.
3. Visualise Tool – a Mobile Augmented Reality (AR) app.

Before proceeding, Professor Bloom conveyed thanks to team, BIF and its Strategic Director, Joe Donnell; the University of Essex and Professor Bloom's Innovation Team which included Animorph Line and Tech Co-operative and independent Researchers such as George Lambe. Professor Bloom also took a moment to express support for funders, having been generously supported by TEO, Belfast City Council and the Community Relations Council, who all understood what Professor Bloom and his team were trying to do and their support was very much appreciated.

Where did this idea come from? Professor Bloom explained that they had always wanted something that was community led and people driven. In a sense, they wanted to combine

ideas of community democracy, empowered future building and the creation of different types of shared spaces, not just physical but virtual spaces. The aim was to create various ways for people to interact, collaborate and build their short and long-term futures together.

The aims of the project (as detailed in his presentation) were not only for building a shared future, but also to help overcome the present crisis of Covid 19.

Core principles had always been combining communication, consultation and cooperation. The community expressed that they wanted a greater ability to participate, learn about new types of innovative approaches and see them being realised.

How was it developed? The Toolkit's development included working with some of the interface communities across Belfast and some very interesting innovators. The timeline of the project was set out (as detailed in the presentation).

Looking at these activities in further detail, a short video explained the Explore Tool and Local Interface Network. This tool was currently being used in 10 Youth Centres in interface areas across Belfast. An entire collaborative website had been created for use in cross-community collaboration which included a video game, a participatory budgeting game, interactive maps, discussion forums as well as all the interesting community innovations that were happening. It also had ability for file sharing, surveys and shared writing tools. The Propose Tool had also been created (*as per video*), working with a local digital artist who would be able to help people turn their ideas for a football pitch into an actual funding visual plan. The final part of the Toolkit was the Visualise Tool (*as explained in video*).

What's next? The Initial Impact, Diverse Promotion Plan and Going Forward was demonstrated (*as detailed in the presentation*).

Professor Bloom played a short video of Testimonials received from Brian Caskey of Limestone United, and Billie-Jean Bradshaw, a Lagan Village Youth Worker (*video*).

In conclusion, Professor Bloom thanked the Forum for the opportunity and honour to be part of this, believing this to be a very strong Toolkit which could make a true difference in bringing communities together in an exciting, empowering and innovative way.

Mr Stewart thanked Mr Smyth and Professor Bloom for what was a fascinating insight into their approach to challenging/answering how a desire for change could be turned into delivering change, and they had shown what could happen when two fundamental tools were harnessed. This demonstrated, real, genuine local democracy and innovation and pulling those things together in a way that provided the opportunity to move from ideas to reality for communities, and this had been inspiring and very encouraging.

Moving on to the third presentation, Mr Stewart advised the Forum would hear about another dimension of this very important work, from Becca Bor of St Columb's Park House to tell the Forum about what was happening at the particular interface of Tullyally and Currynierin.

Presentation 3: St Columb's Park House – Interface work at Tullyally/Currynierin – Becca Bor

Ms Bor thanked the Chair and advised that work had just finished on a 3-year project called the Common Ground Project in Currynierin and Tullyally. Before discussing this work, Ms Bor explained that St Columb's Park House (SCPH) was a Peace and Reconciliation Centre on the Waterside in Derry City and their mission was to provide sanctuary and support for local residents to become changemakers, peacemakers/builders and community leaders.

Many of the programmes of SCPH revolved around the actual space in the park, connecting with nature, with others, with themselves, and recently there had been a beautiful revamping of the actual physical space, including the rebuilding of the walled garden behind SCPH which Ms Bor encouraged people to visit.

SCPH had been working in Tullyally and Currynierin for the past five years and had been approached by the Management Committees from both these areas four years ago with a request to tender for a programme in order to carry out cross-community and shared work there. It was hoped to be able to build on the existing structures there, the Committees, the Community Centres and have additional cross-community work to programming that already existed. However, it was very clear when they began the Common Ground Project that there were massive gaps in lack of investment in the two areas. Currynierin and Tullyally were within the Waterside DEA and as such they were within the City, but they were the last two estates before going into the rural area, so there was a sense of isolation from the City and a sense of lack of investment. Both these areas were within the Neighbourhood Renewal Area, however, with high levels of social deprivation and lack of community connection in terms of accessibility, etc., both these areas had not had ongoing, sustainable investment and support from local Government or from Council, etc. SCPH discovered very quickly that there were massive needs in the area and that in some ways, their Programme was one of the only to actually deliver programmes and services in the area at the time. Because of this, there was a sense from the community of neglect.

The Community Centre in Currynierin had no funding from the Department for Communities even though it was within the Neighbourhood Renewal Area. The Community Centre itself was owned by the community so the building was not maintained by anyone which meant they existed by trying to find small grants in order to turn the lights and heating on and had no full-time worker in situ.

In Tullyally, there was a similar sense of neglect and deprivation and, whilst they had a nice Community Centre, for the three years the Common Ground Project ran, a Community Centre Manager had been in post for less than half that time, and there were lots of vacancies in what could have been two thriving areas with ongoing investment. Unfortunately, that had not been the case.

When the Peace Project entered the area and from talking to the two Committees, they began providing some of the programming that people wanted. It was also very clear there was no youth provision, no ongoing programmes and both Committees wanted this Programme to fill in some of those gaps. The first thing SCPH did, in partnership with BIP, was to begin to seek the youth provision that was so desperately needed. So, the Common Ground Peace Project became both a project to deliver cross-community programming and also a strategic project in trying to establish how to advocate for these areas, to ensure they were sustainable, had secure investment and to help to open some of doors that had been closed. Also to work out how to talk with the communities and work with the Committees to allow them to have their voices heard, not just within their communities, but across the interface and to local Council, to the Department for Communities and wider.

SCPH began running all sorts of programmes for both communities, for example, a homework club for the kids, an outdoor adventure programme which explored the Faughan River and explored the eco-system as a whole. Members from both communities now went fishing at the Faughan, took walks, and young people explored the river. For adults, they ran Wellbeing Programmes, Arts & Crafts Programmes, Healthy Cooking and Physical Activity Programmes, held ongoing coffee mornings, arranged trips for the young people which brought residents from both estates together. They arranged that all of the activities existed in both Centres and facilitated bringing community members from Tullyally to Currynierin, and vice versa, and people began to travel between the two areas more

comfortably. Not to overstate it, there were people who did not want to enter the other Community's Centre, but some progress was made. There was also the reality due to Covid, which in some ways was a surprise, that they fell into a new virtual shared space where individuals signed up for Yoga or Arts & Crafts programmes or other things they organised virtually for people who maybe wouldn't go to the other Community Centre, but were very happy to socialise or participate online with members of the other community, so it wasn't the human connection that was the problem, it was more the physical space.

Also, over the last year during Covid, there were a variety of programmes arranged which included sending out activity packs and working with volunteers who really stepped up over the course of the year and were delivering Covid packs to their communities, knocking on doors, making sure everyone was OK, and bringing the two communities together. The community spirit in each area was amazing to see, particularly for people who hadn't been involved in volunteering much before, but really found an opportunity to come forward and help their communities. Seeing the ways in which people came together and the community spirit that came from the feeling of needing to stand up for each other and help each other out, was something that SCPH continued to foster in the last year.

To give the Forum a sense of the scale of this project, the two communities comprised of around 600 households, so two relatively small estates on the outskirts of Derry. Over 500 people participated in at least one programme or one event that was hosted. Because there wasn't other programming in the area, no one was ever turned away and they had participants who continued to come whether it was throughout the homework clubs, or trips, etc, and participated in over 150 hours. This engendered real collaboration between the two Committees, much of which was under the radar, because Tullyally had more sustainable funding so each time Tullyally brought in resource for themselves, they made sure Currynierin had resource also. Examples of this cooperation included:

- Tullyally brought in 'peace bites' and ensured these were also provided to Currynierin.
- When there was no worker in Currynierin, in a year when Currynierin didn't receive any funding from the local Council and they were literally going around door to door collecting money to be able to turn the lights on in the Community Centre, Tullyally allowed for half of their spots on their Summer scheme to be designated to Currynierin's children.
- Tullyally needed help to clear out a room and some people from Currynierin came down to assist.
- Tullyally got new chairs for the community centre and they sent all their old chairs to Currynierin as they had no funding for chairs.

This was ongoing and individuals on the Committee in Tullyally were very clear from the beginning that they wanted to do everything they could to advocate not only for themselves but also for Currynierin. There were many other examples of Currynierin wishing to help in different ways whether it was through volunteering where some volunteers in Currynierin went to Tullyally to do certain 'in kind' volunteer work. Collaboration like that, where perhaps the wider community was not aware of, people were working within the community who saw that working together for both areas was key to moving forward and advocating for each other.

Sometimes there were very public acts of solidarity and collaboration, for example, as part of SCPH advocacy in building the relationships with statutory organisations and local Government, local politicians and officials made visits and were conducted on a walk around in both communities by residents who talked about what they wanted to see developed, what their hopes were for the area, etc, and community members from Tullyally, in a public forum,

were advocating for Currynierin and vice versa, and people from Currynierin were advocating that there needed to be more programming for Tullyally's Community Centre, which had been wonderful to see.

The video shown illustrated the work done in Tullyally and Currynierin which gave a sense of what the Common Ground Project was able to achieve.

In the last nine months of the project, there had been a big focus on ensuring that when the Common Ground Project ended, that these areas were not being left with nothing sustainable in its place. Work was undertaken with the Department for Communities, the local Growth Partnership and Council to ensure there was more responsibility being taken for these areas, to ensure they were not going to be neglected again. One area of frustration for the Community Committees and for residents was that there would be a big gap between programmes and the feeling that agencies came in and delivered something while funding existed and then pulled out again when funding ended, rather than building something sustainable. Because of that, SCPH were determined, at least in the short term, to apply for some further funding to continue with strategic work and directly support the Committees. To this end, the "Dare to Dream" Project was being introduced, supported by CFNI and funded by Esmé Fairblain and the Paul Hamlin Foundation. This was an 18-month programme and the first nine months entailed working with a residents' group from the community to create a community plan that aligned itself with the local growth plan but also demonstrated key things everyone wanted to see in the community. This project also had a participatory budgeting (PB) process within it. One thing the community had articulated was the feeling that promises were being made without seeing any actual wins and the idea of the PB process was to build in real wins which came from the community, which they could see being developed, and this was something that would be taken forward as part of the 'Dare to Dream' Project. Another component of this project was to continue to build relationships and advocate for sustainable funding, for the Department for Communities to take Currynierin back 'under its wing', and for Derry & Strabane District Council follow through in getting parks and pitches redone and continue to advocate for other funding and other opportunities within those areas. SCPH wanted to work with all the statutory agencies to reconnect the Housing Executive, the PSNI or Community Wardens, etc, to these areas. Trying to build those relationships was key for 'Dare to Dream' to allow the communities to become part of the fabric of the Waterside, and have them further prioritised on the list of areas that needed to be improved upon, something which was so desperately needed.

SCPH also applied to TEO central Good Relations in order to support the Currynierin and Tullyally Community Committees, both in terms of their training and to implement a Volunteer Management Structure. In the last year, with the support of BIF, six local residents achieved their Youth Work OCN Level 2 qualification, and it was planned to take them through to Level 3 to allow them to volunteer and possibly secure part-time work when the Centres were open. So, this was part of scaling up the area and enabling residents to take a more active role in their community which had been a key objective.

Finally, SCPH was also fortunate to get some funding from the NIO in order to support Currynierin particularly in a community safety and youth project in order that there could be an actual part-time worker on the ground who would be able to run some of the youth programming within the Centre. These were not solutions, they were a temporary fix for the next nine to 18 months in these areas and there was an onus and duty of care on the statutory organisations and local Government for these areas. SCPH would continue to bring pressure to bear, advocate and lobby as much as possible for these areas because, the feeling of neglect was based in reality and in order for progress to be made towards peace and further collaboration and solidarity across the interface, these areas needed to be strong and vibrant and the residents needed to feel dignified and respected, listened to and heard to have policies in terms of tackling poverty and mental health issues that the programme

would not solve immediately. Everyone had a role in advocating for these areas, and in every deprived area, to make sure that policies across Government benefitted and lifted up these communities and ensured that doors continued to be opened and made communities feel that they had hope in the future. This was the energy and excitement that SCPH wanted to harness, coming out of the Common Ground Project into the future for these two areas.

Mr Stewart thanked Ms Bor for another fascinating insight into what this work meant 'on the ground'. There were three very clear themes coming through:

- 1) The importance of community empowerment.
- 2) The synergy when two communities came together and took control of the agenda, with the whole being much more than the sum of the parts when that happened.
- 3) A very clear message of the importance of commitment from the statutory sector, of ongoing and sustained investment in communities and showing faith in them to deliver when they were empowered to do so.

Mr Stewart conveyed gratitude to all the presenters today for a very useful, informative insight into various dimensions of the work that was going on and the candour and enthusiasm that everyone showed was greatly appreciated

Mr Stewart advised that it was hoped, before the end of the session, that Ministers would be able to join the Forum and close it.

Q&A Session

After three very interesting presentations, there was now the opportunity for a Q&A discussion and sharing of good practice. Mr Stewart handed over to Mr Gardner, his colleague from TEO, who facilitated this session.

Mr Gardner noted there was time for 10 minutes of questions and advised how the Forum could virtually raise their hand.

Firstly, Mr Gardner took the opportunity to put a question to Mr Smyth and Professor Bloom. He noted that the augmented reality app was fascinating and very innovative, but was a scenario envisaged where the image created by the AR app would be used to further the funding application, or as part of a funding application, to create what the AR app was showing.

Professor Bloom said that was fully the case and the app was being designed precisely for that purpose. What was envisioned and would be the next step was the aim to give community members the opportunity to create their own maps which would be available not only to look at on the app, but also on the public website. It had been designed and developed so that these could then be used by public decision makers to see the different visions and ideas that community members desired, and to then be able to engage with them directly in real time because comments could be made on it. For example, if there was an idea and a public decision maker saw it, they could comment and make further suggestions so they could engage directly on the map or on the website in order to get a better idea of what community members wanted and discuss how it could be made into reality. This was seen as a ground-breaking way to engage and promote real-time collaboration with community members and politicians. Referring to Ms Bor's great presentation, the communities would have the ability to create their own playgrounds on the app, be able to work together on it, look at it in the app and see it. Then politicians could see what was wanted and make suggestions which could be used as the basis to work on strong PB projects. So, this was the vision for the app and was a breakthrough in those terms and

could be a way which would allow community led development with politicians in real time and over time.

Gordon Walker made an observation, rather than having a question, explaining that many years ago he had worked for the IFI, via CRC, on the Peace Walls Programme. His observation was that it was amazing what could happen when people actually cooperated together. The main thing for them at that time was pulling people together and consulting/orientation on removal of barriers, etc. Mr Walker expressed that he really believed that this innovative step forward with what Peter and the guys at BIF were doing was great because it gave people a vision of how things could be or could look which he thought was a great innovative move to be used with communities and allowing people the opportunity to have their say, via surveys, consultations, etc. He thought that the mere fact that people could actually see ideas being delivered was a great way forward.

Martin McDonald, from CRC, commented that he found the three presentations absolutely fascinating. The DOJ were obviously operating from a 'top down' approach while buying into the need for more community consent. With Becca's presentation in terms of SCPH, this was coming from 'bottom up'. Then Peter's presentation in terms of the app, sat somewhere in the middle and could relate to 'top down' or 'bottom up'. There was probably a solution there because everyone had great difficulty in trying to connect what the policies and programmes were coming from Government with what the aspirations were for communities on the ground. Covid, if it had shown anything, had thrown up the benefit of communication and good community relations in this virtual environment and if lessons could be captured, we needed to try to match what was coming from the top to what the aspirations were coming from the bottom. He felt that the app and the notion of a shared future provided a really innovative solution to do that. He was delighted that the CRC in some small way, via Small Grants Programme, was able to assist in this. In terms of a specific question for Peter, had he found that there was a level of technical/digital expertise required by people that, if they didn't have this, it would be a real barrier to participation. Secondly, had there been experience of any abuse via the app in terms of people misusing it or posting the opposite of good relations messages on it, and if so, how had he handled that.

Professor Bloom firstly thanked the CRC for their grant, adding that their advice and support from the beginning had been incredible. In answer to Mr McDonald's questions, Professor Bloom answered:

- 1) In terms of technical expertise, this was why it had to be a community co-development project. There were all sorts of ways of going about doing what they had done but they wanted to find out what communities wanted, and so they worked with them. So, they were able to overcome some of those issues through a participatory, bottom-up development process. It was not a case of them developing it and handing it over. There was a real art in science in making community technology, for example, and they tried to make it as accessible as possible. So they created a dashboard just for community leaders that was very clear and gave them an idea of what they needed to do. This was tested with them to decide if it was too complicated or not and had worked on the Community Technology Framework for that purpose. They also looked at how they could find various ways to promote it across different age groups with different technical expertise. For example, they found that young people understood AR immediately, but they had to find different ways to engage with people who had less experience with this. So, there were techniques used and it was developed and tested it for that purpose. Initial testing showed that it was very intuitive, and a lot of work had gone into making sure on that basis.
- 2) In terms of misuse of the app, they did have moderation which was important. It had been developed with community leaders, but they had been very surprised, because of

concern about that issue, and certainly in workshops, comments could be heard. But in Belfast, the more you were made fun of, the more they liked you, and they were not always shy when saying that they didn't like something. Various frameworks were put in place and it was developed with this issue in mind, but it had been live now for two months and they had not had one negative comment, only positive comments. Professor Bloom added that he had found that when there was engagement and allowing people to have the space to collaboratively engage with innovative ideas to build a future together, there would definitely be more positive and collaborative engagement. One of the wonderful things they had seen, and that they would continue to track, was that it was not that people didn't disagree, but it was about creating very empowering spaces so that they could turn what could be entrenched and inexorable differences into a sense of shared spirit, purpose and future building. So far, they had been really happy because this was what they had observed and was why they wanted to expand it.

Mr Gardner thanked everyone for their questions, answers and comments and advised that if anyone had any further questions, they could be sent via email, etc. post the event.

Mr Stewart thanked Mr Gardner and for everyone who participated in that very insightful discussion.

Mr Stewart advised he was very pleased to welcome Arlene Foster, First Minister of NI and handed over to Mrs Foster to say a few words before closing the Forum.

Arlene Foster, First Minister of Northern Ireland

Mrs Foster, on behalf of herself and the Deputy First Minister, thanked the Forum for the invitation to join, advising that she was pleased to be present to take part and provide the closing remarks. She thanked CRC for organising the event for TEO, and commented that it was great to see so many participants.

Mrs Foster advised all T:BUC's endeavours would be hindered if safe communities could not be achieved. Recent events showed how calm could be jeopardised and Mrs Foster was saddened to see young people drawn into trouble. But, with the help of the community, the majority of young people were not drawn into trouble and engagement continued to try to deliver change and progress. Although there were challenges, there were great strides forward and a lot to celebrate. Equality of opportunity and diversity should be celebrated to allow communities to work, live and socialise together, free from prejudice and in tolerance.

The catalyst for change included providing safe places in the community, with 80% of people now feeling fairer to people from a different background. Of course, there was more to do to work towards a safe community, and the future of NI would not be found in division. It was a privilege to call NI home and Mrs Foster was pleased that TEO supported this programme and expressed how she looked forward to continuing to be involved when she left office. Mrs Foster thanked the Forum for listening.

Thanking Mrs Foster, and with a few minutes to spare before Declan Kearney, MLA, joined the session, Mr Stewart asked the Presenters if they had one question for the First Minister, what would it be.

Ms Bor said her ask would be for the Assembly to address poverty in their areas, as there were over 400,000 people currently living below the poverty line with deprivation getting worse. Although there was relative peace, the real harm to women and children was poverty. This meant that wages and benefits needed to be increased and social services and community work needed to improve. These factors if addressed would work well beside

policies and would help with mental and physical health which was key for any work towards peace.

Mr Stewart added that the anti-poverty strategy would underpin all those objectives.

Paul Smyth said his ask would be that issues of lack of resourcing should be addressed in interface areas. Young people were asking for simple things, for example, more buses and play parks. Young people were having to take two or three buses to get to school so the ask was for TEO to look at the lack of resources in these community areas.

Paul Bloom commented that there was a need to bridge the future divide and opportunities were needed to find new ways to bring communities together. This needed more imagination to bring it to reality. It was felt there was a lack of resources but also that we didn't know what the answers were, and people needed the ability to build a future together and in a shared way.

Mr Stewart welcomed Declan Kearney to the Forum and asked him to deliver some closing remarks.

Declan Kearney MLA

Speaking in both English and Irish, Mr Kearney thanked the Forum for the invitation to speak. While there were positives and negatives to hosting an event like this online, it was great to see this event happening and it was very important to hear about the ongoing work to promote relationships across our community. He had been privileged to work with Arlene, Michelle and Gordon over the past 14 months and noted that, no matter what challenges there were, there was a determination to promote good relations in lives and in the community. This proved how flexibility to adapt and persevere had allowed work to continue across all sections of the community. It was one community with different perspectives and Mr Kearney looked forward to continuing to work towards this.

Under T:BUC principles, feeling safe was a right for everyone and this was integral to having a power sharing Government in our society. The Youth Programme was crucial to the overall contribution towards a safe and connected community. All Youth Programmes were reaching children at the start of their school life which provided life-long learnings for children to better understand differences, and kindness was crucial. For young children from different traditions and cultural backgrounds, seven projects had engaged with marginal communities in our society. Ambassadors were role models for young people and for everyone.

Mr Kearney had been particularly encouraged to take part in community relations initiatives and having ongoing engagement with young people to learn new skills and build confidence. Investment was needed in the potential of all young people to allow them to become well-rounded adults, leaders of the future and be agents of change to allow development and change.

Referring to the presentation regarding work on the interfaces, Mr Kearney advised this was very challenging work and he wished to commend all those individuals who worked on interfaces and who ensured that physical barriers were removed so that they were no longer impediments to the community. He was very encouraged by Government initiatives and by groups 'on the ground', where it counted.

Mr Kearney expressed congratulations to Baroness May Blood in being presented with the Good Relations Award, noting that she had been an outstanding champion of good relations and had been a stalwart of inter-cultural development, along with being a champion for many

years in her own area of Belfast. She was also an exemplar and an advocate of shared education.

Mr Kearney was pleased to see the contribution of the Limavady Campus and he was encouraged that progress continued to make the environment safe for everyone, to be united and safe, adding that he hoped this opened up a new phase of the peace process for young people. Mr Kearney thanked everyone for listening.

Closing Remarks from Forum Chair, Mr Chris Stewart

Mr Stewart thanked both Mrs Foster and Mr Kearney for their time and for their contributions, noting that the fact that two Ministers had joined the Forum demonstrated how importantly they viewed the work of T:BUC.

Mr Stewart thanked CRC for organising this event.

Finally, Mr Stewart thanked all participants and attendees and commented that what had been heard was very uplifting and inspiring. Much had been done, but there was much still to do, and focus was needed on addressing issues in black and ethnic minority communities. On behalf of these communities, who were regarded as part of the community with needs to be met, and it was planned to address this issue at the next Forum, planned for September when it was hoped that T:BUC would host a Global Engagement Forum along with colleges in the USA. This was at an early stage of planning and more information would follow in due course.

Mr Stewart closed the Forum by thanking the presenters and attendees and looked forward to engaging with everyone at the next Forum.