

T:buc Engagement Forum – Summary Report

19th September 2023

Ebrington Hotel, Derry / Londonderry

The Belfast Good Friday Agreement

Introduction and Welcome

Tim McGarry compered the event noting that one of the aims of T:buc is to promote togetherness and unity. He had personally benefited from CRC as “Give My Head Peace” was part-funded by it, and he is an ambassador for good relations.

Mr McGarry introduced each of the following contributors in turn, who set the scene for the event.

Patricia Logue, Mayor of Derry and Strabane Council

Mayor Logue welcomed all present noting that engagement is essential when addressing good relations. As this is Good Relations Week, many local community organisations are hosting events which enables groups to showcase their work.

This event reflects how far society has come and is an opportunity to reinvigorate ourselves for ongoing challenges. The panel discussion offers a good opportunity to network and highlight the work of the organisations and new projects being developed and there is also the opportunity to learn from projects operating in the city.

Gareth Johnston, deputy secretary for good relations and inclusion at The Executive Office.

Mr Johnston thanked CRC for organising the event and for voluntary sector and government groups for the work they undertake in their communities.

He noted that The Good Friday Agreement paved the way for a different Northern Ireland (NI) and for the fact that the Troubles can be talked about in the past tense. During the event, the impact of the Good Friday Agreement on life in NI will be reflected on. NI has made significant progress towards prosperity and a safer and more inclusive society, but the journey continues – this will be part of the discussion later in the event. Looking forward to the next 25 years, further changes people would like to see will be considered.

In terms of delivery of T:buc strategy, Mr Johnston noted that the Executive is committed to building a truly united society through education, housing, interfaces and young people but there remains work to be done. The fabric of society has changed considerably. The 2021 census has highlighted shifts and trends in population and a more diverse society. Ways must be found to create conditions for

great prosperity – that are inclusive for all. Good relations issues are often underpinned by socioeconomic needs – the wellbeing of citizens, the opportunity to thrive and have the life they want – that is fundamental to the strategy in TEO. Long term sustainable solutions are more likely if the wellbeing of citizens is improved.

As it is Good Relations Week, a number of CRC events have been organised. Attendees were encouraged to participate in some of the events, as working together can make a difference, break down barriers and build more inclusive communities. The example of the hockey programme in schools was highlighted, providing an opportunity for good relations in a natural way and also improving wellbeing, fitness, social development and mental health after Covid. By mainstreaming and linking good relations, it aids the progress that society needs to make.

Mr Johnston also highlighted that one of CRC's partners, ASG & Partners, had been nominated for the UK-wide PRCA awards.

He advised that the forum would provide an opportunity to discuss issues and there would also be updates on TEO work in Derry through community development at Ebrington Square, which is a space for all.

Chris Gardner, Head of T:buc & Good Relations Division, TEO.

Chris Gardner set the scene for the discussion section of the event. He provided some background on the first attempt in 2005 of a good relations policy and strategy with "A Shared Future" by the then Secretary of State. It had homed in on key areas requiring change, for example housing. The new Executive sought to take its own direction and a consultation document came under the radar in 2010 and became strategy. A new strategy was developed in 2013 – Together: Building a United Community. T:buc reflects those aims – youth engagement, urban villages, education, housing, interfaces, etc.

In terms of delivery, Mr Gardner noted that there were some programmes that pre-dated The Good Friday Agreement. In 2012, with a £400,000 budget to deliver 10 programmes, 15 applications were received. Through the T:buc strategy, there has been progress. Although the impact may not necessarily be known, tangible results are evident for example, 69 shared neighbourhoods, the removal of a third of interfaces, and thousands of projects and relationships formed.

However, society still remains highly segregated. There is a somewhat negative slant on the peace enjoyed by society – it is the absence of violence. Whilst it cannot be taken for granted, and many have lived a life without violence, it is not aspirational. 25 years on, it would seem appropriate to shift to a positive peace – a framework to build towards a more prosperous society, with trust between citizens.

In the midst of the review of the T:buc strategy, there is a possible new approach to good relations. It is important everyone has a voice, as each person has a unique

background experience. The discussion section of the forum will offer the opportunity to discuss how The Good Friday Agreement has shaped society.

T:buc panel discussion

Mr McGarry introduced the panel and provided a short bio of each panel member.

- Gareth Johnston - deputy secretary, TEO
- Nisha Tandon - founder, Belfast Mela
- Ruth Gonzalez-Moore - CEO, The Junction
- Pearce McConnell - Programme Manager, Our City Youth
- Prof Brandon Hamber – Chair, INCORE (UU)

The panel were asked the following questions. Responses summarised below each question: -

1. Did you vote for the Good Friday Agreement, and would you do so again now?	
Gareth Johnston	Important to consider what you can do now that you couldn't do before. There were problems, loose ends and difficult times but no-one wants to go back.
Prof Hamber	In global terms, the agreement has been a success and is seen as such across the world, with a decrease in violence and transformation in policing etc. Social division, security incidents – this was not tackled.
Nisha Tandon	Did not want the same past for her children. More work still needs to be done in terms of diversity, inclusion and equality. Whilst it is good to see progress and changes in policing, housing etc, the most important is in grass roots organisations and education – integrated education can bring positive results.
Ruth Gonzalez-Moore	It ended violence, but it is important to hear from those who struggled with change. If doing it again, there should be a plan to tackle the difficult stuff – a partnership role of civic society. We still haven't got our heads round how to do that.
Pearce McConnell	<i>How do young people view it, does it mean anything to them, and does it seem real working in the community?</i> Young people asked to get a read out from them – some were unaware of what it is and don't have an opinion or don't understand it. The younger generation have perhaps a lack of understanding of what it took to achieve it.

	Although they don't understand it, it has affected their lives today. Now it needs to be reshaped and remodelled to reflect a more diverse community and society, which has come about before of the Agreement.
2. What practical steps would you take to improve it?	
Gareth Johnston	A good foundation in what was achieved and in good relations work done. T:buc may have been ahead of the game in diversity – racial as well as from a traditional focus. Should keep going with what we can do well, and there is learning from longer term history. Innovation - drew on science and tech to drive economy and productivity. Concentrating on economic dividends, e.g. tackling sectarianism. Need to unpick what is meant by that, and there is more to be done. There are still issues with, e.g. bonfires, flags – need to face to up real issues and call them out.
Nisha Tandon	Racial equality strategy – important it is embedded in the everyday work we do, which is the only way to create the respect that is needed. Strategy needs to be inclusive of all, not just the two main communities. Important to respect all and consider how foreigners living here have contributed, not just those who bring in investment.
Ruth Gonzalez-Moore	<i>What are the top 3-4 things you would do if in charge?</i> There is no executive – government is a human right, and it needs to be addressed. Pluralistic society – all identities should be respected, We are evolving politically; need to engage critically with our own history – moving away from combative politics and adopting an inclusive mindset.
Prof Hamber	<i>Is there anything we can learn from elsewhere?</i> Other countries may have more honest discussions – people don't talk about the elephant in room here. Poor leadership - not embracing peace in the way they should. Until then, there is a risk NI will languish in the middle space.
Pearce McConnell	<i>Will young people make it any better? What improvements could be made?</i> Opportunities for partnership work, programmes, work in secondary schools – not necessarily integrated education, but working together in a positive way and bringing both communities together earlier. When they find out their

	<p>commonalities, it outvalues their differences. Investment in more shared spaces can bring challenges and issues, but can also bring positivity and an opportunity to build up trust. E.g. sports – integrate at grass roots; play together, bring groups together;</p>
3. 25 years on, are you optimistic?	
Nisha Tandon	<p>Good leaders are required. The census shows the population has changed therefore leadership needs to change accordingly. Young people want to change but have no resource.</p>
Ruth Gonzalez-Moore	<p>We have to be optimistic and think about new stories, see each other and recognise each other and work to build relationships between communities. Would like to be able to say “community” rather than “communities”.</p>
Prof. Hamber	<p>Research shows most peace agreements collapse after 5 years. Should be optimistic but not complacent. There are lot of issues coming down the road – poverty, cost of living, referendum etc.</p>
Gareth Johnston	<p>Optimistic due to the change seen in the last 25 years. There is a real opportunity to take some of these and embed into actions. Opportunity to shift thinking from peace just being an absence of violence to a positive peace. We need to think about next stages of housing, education, shared spaces.</p> <p>Optimistic as we have leadership in this room with the community and voluntary sector who are informed, realistic, and willing to tackle real issues. E.g. Pearce, who is in touch with the voice of young people, and willing to represent it to people in government. With new programme for government, T:buc, refugee policy etc, the stars are in alignment for something optimistic.</p>
Pearce McConnell	<p>There is evidence of it in the community and in personal life – friendships, relationships built – there are signs of optimism. For young people – shared spaces, sports etc - investing in right areas and right places is important.</p>

Presentations

Tim McGarry introduced each of the following presentations and presenters, as noted below.

1. Shared Housing – Regeneration of former St Patricks Barracks / Radius Housing, Grainne Mullan, Lisa Mooney and Maciet Bayot.

Grainne Mullan provided an introduction and overview of the planned regeneration of the former St Patrick's barracks site for 125 affordable homes, as a shared housing development. Information was provided on the development plan and scope, history, partners and aspirations. Key points from the presentation noted as follows:-

- Site is owned by Department for Communities who are leading on the regeneration, in conjunction with DfI, Mid & East Antrim Council, Radius Housing, PSNI and community groups.
- Ambitious project expected to deliver £160m investment on the 15-hectare site in Ballymena, transforming the area and creating jobs.
- Key stages of development –
 - o £7.5m DfC link road linking north and south of the town and giving access to ECOS land.
 - o 135 high quality homes commissioned, which will also generate opportunities. First handovers anticipated early next year, with completion in summer 2025.
 - o New NRC college (£45m investment) due to be open for September 2024 term.
 - o i4C innovation and cleantech centre under the Belfast region city deal.
 - o M&EA Council planning to build new leisure, health and wellbeing centre with a focus on a joint shared space. Design team has been appointed, plans to be submitted by year end.
 - o New PSNI station.
- Social value outcomes – 3 key themes: -
 - o Job creation / economic growth.
 - o Strength of community.
 - o Health, wellbeing and the environment.
- What has been delivered so far: -
 - o Working closely with partners
 - o Schools and community engagement,
 - o Job opportunities
 - o Community events
 - o Salvaged material from the site for reuse
- Video outlining the history of site was shown

- Making space for creatives / creation of social housing welcomed (Gemma Reid, Daisy Chain)
- Site purchased from the OFMDFM; programme board have been working to deliver multiple services. What was once a closed military site will become a shared space, open to the public (Gerry Mahon).

Lisa Mooney outlined the Housing for All strategic aim to bring communities together, as supported by the NI executive, with a commitment to deliver 200 shared units per year. New advisory group established comprising statutory and community bodies in the area, with good attendance at the meetings to date. Radius has supported 69 events, worked with 59 partners and 3000 people. Aim to have both physical regeneration, and for people to come together and build relationships.

Video shown on two projects –

- Knock Knock project (Nandi Jola) – outlining work with schools to develop a book with school children as the contributors, with the book being launched in Stormont.
- GAA Schools Fun Day – funding received from Radius. Aim was to introduce children to Gaelic games and support diversity and community cohesion through sport.

Maciet Bayot provided an overview of the “For your freedom and ours” programme with Ballymena cadets.

- Approximately 25,000 – 30,000 Polish people living in NI – the largest minority group in NI.
- The programme was launched in 2014 as a result of anti-Polish sentiment and a high level of hate crime. Although hate crime had been condemned, this seemed to increase hate sentiment so it was felt education would be a better route.
- An anti-hate crime / good relations programme has developed highlighting the history of Polish people in NI who served during WWII. The six-week programme provides a factual and authentic approach to promoting inclusion and has had over 3,000 graduates.
- Model is based on four S’s - shared history, shared space, shared experience and shared future.
- There are two main programmes – the Polish wings heritage trail and the educational campaign. The Polish wings heritage trail focuses on Polish pilots based in NI during WWII and incorporates recognition, research, virtual trails and memorials. The educational campaign deals with existing preconceptions (shared history, cultural differences); discovery (reconciliation and peace process) and provides an inclusive approach to diversity.
- The project has been delivered initially to 25 army cadets with a further 50 from army, sea and air cadets. 30 cadets will be selected to go to Poland on

a study visit which will include a session on peace and reconciliation.

2. Urban Villages – Ciaran McGurk, Head of capital programme, Urban Villages (including Ebrington, Maze, Long Kesh)

Ebrington Regeneration – Martin Turner.

Joan O'Hara introduced the section, handing over to Ciaran McGurk.

URBAN VILLAGES

Ciaran McGurk provided an overview of the Urban Villages Initiative, which was launched in 2016. Key points noted as follows:

- **Headline action within the T:buc strategy, overseen (not funded) by The Executive Office**
- Initiative designed to improve good relations outcomes and develop thriving places where there has been a history of deprivation and community tension. Can physical infrastructure improve good relations? The idea that if you make communities look and feel better, there will be a sense of pride. Quality buildings bring better behaviours (local example given). The length of time required to deliver capital projects was highlighted, noting the importance of thinking ahead.
- In terms of physical infrastructure, it is currently approximately a quarter the way through, with more to come in the next three to four years.
- Five areas developed noted below with further detail given on each of the areas: -
 - o North Belfast – Ardoyne, greater Ballysillan.
 - o South Belfast – Sandy Row, Donegall pass and markets.
 - o East Belfast – Eastside.
 - o West Belfast – Colin.
 - o Derry – Bogside and Fountain area.
- Aims of urban village programme – Improve physical environment, build community capacity, foster positive community identities. A number of people were employed on the ground to build community capacity – this is important so it has an impact into the future.
- The UV Model – area based approach focusing on good relations, not a one-off investment. Area based strategic frameworks developed to enable local communities to identify strategic actions. Local reference groups established as key consultative forum. Local coordinators and support officers based in local premises engaging on the ground. Master planning approach to capital investment. Urban Villages creates the social fabric as an enabler for good relations and allows the community to shape the investment, rather than it being government imposed.

- UN Investment – three investment platforms – capital investment, community led, cross cutting across all five Urban Village areas.
- Capital investment / regeneration – total capital investment by 2027 - £108m. Range of departments involved (figures by dept outlined). Investment to date - £38m in smaller schemes, 54 shared space projects. All project types – parks, environmental improvement schemes, shared community buildings
£70m budget remaining – larger transformational projects are yet to come e.g. Meenan Square, Donegall Pass.
- Regeneration and good relations
Outcomes / headlines – 75 projects by 2027 (54 to date); 1500 good relations events, 3000 training courses, 1400 good relations programmes. 150,000 participants. Outcome based accountability approach to all investment. (figures were overviewed, as outlined in the presentation).
- Before & After - Some of the bigger projects yet to be developed were overviewed e.g. ABC Trust health and leisure hub - £6.4m; Donegall pass good relations hub £12m; redevelopment of Meenan Square - £11m (community consultation process due to start in October).
- Regeneration in Ardoyne / Marrowbone – (video not played) – this programme is infrastructure led but needs to be backed up by building community capacity.

EBRINGTON REGENERATION

Martin Turner provided a brief history of the site, from its beginning in 1840 as Star Fort, up to present day.

- Key dates: -
 - o First master plan drawn up - 2007
 - o Opening of Peace Bridge - 2011
 - o Ebrington Square opened – 2012
 - o City of Culture - 2013
 - o Consultation – 2014/2015
 - o Outline planning approval being signed off - January 2016.
- Capital works – removal of old services (canons, grenades), listed buildings, asbestos removal. Disposals – 26 assets, currently up to nine with disposals continuing today, with two final tenants being agreed.
- Grade A offices – new sustainable jobs rather than displacement. Work started in 2015. A market failure in provision of grade A space was identified, and a developer secured to build 80k sq ft net. 95% of investors are from

Derry & Strabane, and the two neighbouring council areas.

- Outline approval received in 2016 - Map showing detail of site was overviewed.
- Figures were reviewed on the number of buildings, capital investment and people on site in Ebrington – in 2016, present day and projections for 2032.
- In summary – development provides high quality public realm and flexible workspace, grade A BREEAM excellent accommodation. Retrofit and sustainable regeneration.

3. Overview of Peace Summit 2023. The unfinished business of Peace and reconciliation - Prof. Brandon Hamber

Background – 25 years since the agreement, people were asked what remained to be done, how to achieve it, and who is responsible for delivery. 800 were interviewed across 30 different events including youth engagements, workshops, community dialogues, citizens' assemblies, and meetings at universities.

A report has been produced (link provided), and the intention is to extend the conversation to today's forum.

There are four main areas to consider: -

- **Political progress** – critical of lack of institutions.
- **Participation and civic engagement** – ordinary people feel there is a barrier, and are not part of discussions.
- **Cohesion and sharing** – segregation, paramilitary control in some areas, integrated education.
- **Issues not addressed in the agreement** – legacy of the past, Brexit and constitutional matters; mental health issue and the conflict (not talked about in 1998), new communities (migration to NI, racism).

Addressing the past and building the future – there is tension between wanting to be positive but a feeling that there are issues holding it back.

Some quotations from the report were outlined. These were workshopped and put into a Call to Action to summarise what people wanted. 12 things – see list at App 1.

Next steps – a call to action offers a roadmap; a functioning political system in parallel with a vehicle to enhance civic engagement, and to formulate a plan.

Discussion / Interactive Survey

Interactive survey available via Vevox App. (downloadable at the day). A number of questions were asked, and the answers summarised, including the following: -

- Average age of attendees – 45
- Length of time working or volunteering in the good relations sector - 30% had worked in GR for 10-20 years.
- How long do you anticipate continuing to work in the sector – 23% said 2-3 more years.
- 12 calls to action to be discussed in groups (top 3) and ranked via App or on paper copies available at each table. Some comments included noting each one is interlinked and the importance of integrated education.
- Do you think peace should be prioritised in new programme for government? Some comments included “what is definition of peace, it can be different for different communities”.
- Explanation of why you said yes or no – variety of opinions expressed.
- Looking to future and next 25 years, what are the hopes and aspirations you have for better community relationships? Variety of answers given.

Professor Hamber concluded the interactive / discussion session advising that were a range of events planned over the next year. The aim is to turn the 12 actions into an action plan, and open engagement is welcomed.

He thanked organisers for giving him the opportunity to speak at the forum and encouraged everyone to read the report as it provides a good summary of what people want for peace.

Event Conclusion

Tim McGarry invited Gareth Johnston to make closing remarks. Mr Johnston thanked all those who had made presentations, the CRC for organising the event and Tim for acting as compere. He advised that the results of the discussion section of the event would be taken forward, with the vision of moving into a co-design phase of a new T:buc strategy and talking to political parties. The CRC will produce a summary report of this event, and the marketplace will be available after lunch as well as tours of the Ebrington estate, peace bridge and other estate sites.

Mr Johnston thanked all attendees for joining the forum, for their time and contribution to good relations.

Tim McGarry also advised of a presentation on social values taking place in the afternoon, along with two field study visits to Ebrington Estate and good relations projects in Derry city and an integrated education event at the Ulster Hall in October.