

## Belfast City Council's Good Relations Fund

By Caroline Wilson, Good Relations Officer



Good Relations Officers, Caroline and Anne.  
Photo: Belfast City Council

Belfast City Council is inviting applications for their funding programme for community relations and cultural diversity projects in the city.

The fund, totalling £220,000, is available to community groups and other organisations involved in reconciliation and cultural diversity.

The aim of the fund is to promote good relations between people of different religious and political beliefs and different racial groups. Grants are available up to £10,000 and over 60 groups have already received funding.

One example of a project, organised by Interaction Belfast, is a cultural diversity and dialogue programme for community activists working at the interface, exploring aspects of community identity. Another project, led by Roden Street Community Development Group, is a year-long programme to support a number of anti-racism initiatives within their community development programme. Templemore Family Support Centre has also just received funding for an inter-generational single identity project exploring citizenship and cultural identity using the medium of art.

*'Belfast City Council is committed to promoting understanding and respect for people of all cultures who live and work here'*

According to Caroline Wilson, Good Relations Officer, 'The aim of the Good Relations Fund is to build robust relationships and any project should include some element of challenge. It might be a training programme

on the theme of managing conflict and difference or it could be a dialogue initiative, supporting people to look at current difficult issues in their local area.

'Belfast City Council is committed to promoting understanding and respect for people of all cultures who live and work here. We hope to support the important work happening at community level which is building better relations and contributing to a more stable and tolerant city.'

Belfast City Council unanimously adopted its Good Relations Strategy in February 2003 and it is one of the key objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan. The Good Relations Unit is financially supported by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

The funding programme is open for applications until 31 March 2005. If you would like to discuss a potential project or need further information, contact Anne Deighan or Caroline Wilson, Good Relations Officers in the Unit on (028) 9027 0663.

Application forms and guidance notes are available from [www.belfastcity.gov.uk](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk) or the Good Relations Unit, Belfast City Council, City Hall, Belfast BT1 5GS.

## TACKLING RACISM IN SOUTH BELFAST

By Paul Donnelly

Much attention has been given this year to the growth of racist attacks and harassment, particularly in the Donegall Road and Donegall Pass areas of South Belfast. Attacks on homes, the distribution of a racist leaflet, and opposition to the development of a Chinese community centre have contributed to a public perception of these communities as being racist. *Interface* visited community groups in the area and the South Belfast Partnership Board to find out about initiatives to prevent attacks, respond to incidents and promote a greater awareness and tolerance of ethnic minorities.

A number of initiatives have been undertaken in South Belfast at community level. This year's first Donegall Road Festival in August provided confirmation of steps being taken by community



Donegall Road community festival, August 2004. Photo: Belfast City Council

activists to start addressing the problems of racism in the community. *Interface* spoke with festival organiser Melissa Moorhead of the Greater Village Regeneration Trust. She spoke of the

concern residents in the area felt at the attacks and of the hurt felt at the damage done to the community by the perpetrators.

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*Interface* is the news-sheet of Belfast Interface Project and reflects the views and diversity of our membership groups. *Interface* seeks to promote good practice around interface community issues and increased communication between groups across the city. The editor reserves the right to amend articles where appropriate with the consent of the author. The views expressed in *Interface* do not necessarily represent those of the management committee.



### How to contact Belfast Interface Project

2nd floor, Glendinning House  
6 Murray Street  
Belfast  
BT1 6DN  
t (028) 9024 2828  
f (028) 9031 4829  
e [info@belfastinterfaceproject.org](mailto:info@belfastinterfaceproject.org)  
[www.belfastinterfaceproject.org](http://www.belfastinterfaceproject.org)



Our website will be launching soon!  
[www.belfastinterfaceproject.org](http://www.belfastinterfaceproject.org)

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## BIP Launch A Policy Agenda for the Interface

By Paul Donnelly



Deputy Mayor Joe O'Donnell and Lord Mayor Tom Ekin at BIP Policy Paper launch. Photo: Frankie Quinn

Belfast Interface Project launched its policy paper *A Policy Agenda for the Interface* at the Lord Mayor's parlour in Belfast City Hall in July 2004. The paper was produced following consultation with a number of interface community representatives and with the assistance and expertise of Brendan Murtagh and Dr. Peter Shirlow.

The launch was hosted by the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Tom Ekin and was attended by representatives of a number of interface community groups. Importantly, the paper received cross-party support from councillors representing all of the political parties within Belfast City Council. The Lord Mayor, Deputy Lord Mayor Joe O'Donnell, and High Sheriff Ruth Patterson also spoke at the launch in support of the paper.

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# Summer 2004 Review

By Paul Donnelly and Chris O'Halloran

In the May issue of *Interface*, contributors expressed the hope that the coming summer would be free from inter-communal violence. The hope was that we could build on the relatively quiet summer of 2003 when enormous time, energy and commitment had been invested by people across the city to ensure that the events of 2001 and 2002 were not repeated.

Alongside this hope lay an acknowledgement that inter-community tensions and concerns often rise during the summer period and that the contentious issues of parades and protests, combined with other factors including the almost traditional feature of 'recreational' youth-led violence, possess the potential to produce deterioration in relationships particularly at Belfast's interfaces.

Perhaps the most memorable images of the summer, in terms of civil disorder in Belfast, were of the disturbances at the Ardoyne shops on the 12th July, following a rise in tensions associated with the parade/protest issue there. A month earlier, tensions between the communities had been high also in relation to the

proposed Whiterock parade along the Springfield Road, although the event had passed off tensely but relatively peacefully on the day.

Some commentators have focused on these and other contentious events as evidence that the political and peace processes are flawed, or that the intentions of some groups are not genuinely directed towards reducing tensions and creating better relationships. It is certainly true that profound divisions, mistrust and hurt continue to exist and can be deepened by unresolved dispute and conflict.

*One prominent conflict resolution theorist has suggested that the time that it takes to resolve a conflict is roughly proportional to the duration of the conflict itself.*

Regardless of these views, however,

there has been a significant reduction in the duration, scope and intensity of civil disturbances in interface areas compared to previous summers. There is no doubt that this is in huge part due to the actions of local community activists, leaders and others working to manage interface tensions in interface areas across Belfast.

This is, very emphatically, not to say that interface communities experienced a peaceful summer in Belfast.

One prominent conflict resolution theorist has suggested that the time that it takes to resolve a conflict is roughly proportional to the duration of the conflict itself. While this may seem depressing to some, the broad thrust of this case – that we need to be realistic about what we can achieve at any point in time, given our history – is relevant. At the same time, in terms of a continuum that begins with conflict management, moves through conflict resolution and ends with conflict transformation, it is likely that we will continue to require conflict management tools as well as others for some summers to come.



Ardoyne shops, 12th of July

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Reflecting the ethnic diversity of the area, the festival featured Chinese dance in the carnival parade and ethnic minority cultures at an international food fest. Melissa commented, 'People in the area welcomed these aspects of the festival and want to see more work done around this issue'.

The South Belfast Partnership Board, supported by the Equality Commission, has facilitated monthly round tables involving statutory agency representatives, local politicians, community groups and the PSNI. According to Lee Reynolds, the Board's Strategic Development Officer, there are two priorities for the work. The first is to develop education programmes for communities and schools, involving exhibitions, discussions and cultural awareness events with a view to improving inter-community communication and understanding. A response mechanism, similar to the mobile phone network strategy used in some interface areas, is also being developed in order to react to racist attacks. This would be further supported by response guidance for statutory agencies involved such as the Housing Executive. Lee summarised the underlying principles as being 'to provide victim support and community support so that we can address the different aspects of the issues.'

Whilst much of this work is at the developmental stage, it is important to know that the issue of racism is being discussed and acted upon in the South Belfast communities where it has been evident. *Interface* is aware that much more discussion is needed around these issues and will continue to report on developments.



High Sheriff Ruth Patterson addresses policy launch, with BIP Director Chris O'Halloran and Lord Mayor Tom Ekin. Photo: Frankie Quinn

Section 1 of the document outlines current frustrations within the interface community sector and focuses on the lack of evidence of a coherent city-wide strategy in relation either to the resolution of conflict in interface areas, or to the social and economic regeneration of interface areas.

Section 2 outlines the challenges posed by the paper: the need to design and implement strategies that can help across a broad range of measures in order to promote the social and economic regeneration of interface communities.

Section 3 provides a detailed overview of some key difficulties for interface communities and reminds us that there is little evidence that people living in interface areas are any more sectarian than anyone else in our society.

Section 4 acknowledges the progress made by some government initiatives in addressing some of the above issues and summarises progress as patchy.

Section 5 sets out a vision for the regeneration and long-term development of interface areas and identifies the conditions that we need to aim towards creating.

Section 6 makes a number of recommendations as to how policy needs to change to build towards this vision. A key recommendation is that interface areas need 'a champion at the heart of government'.

At the launch BIP Director Chris O'Halloran concluded, "We need to move beyond a 'sticking plaster' approach to the regeneration of interface communities. We don't claim to have all the answers and we're not saying that the answers are simple, but we need to begin by laying out the problems and prompting discussion and debate."

A *Policy Agenda for the Interface* is available from Belfast Interface Project, tel (028) 9024 2828 or email [info@belfastinterfaceproject.org](mailto:info@belfastinterfaceproject.org).

*there is little evidence that people living in interface areas are any more sectarian than anyone else in our society*

# BIP holds first annual conference

By Chris O'Halloran

Belfast Interface Project held its first annual conference on the morning of June 24th 2004 at the Europa Hotel, Belfast.

The theme of the conference was 'Moving on at the interface?' Around sixty participants, many of them BIP members from interface areas across the city, were presented with the findings of two surveys recently commissioned by Belfast Interface Project.

The first presentation, by Pat McGinn (PMG Consulting Ltd), outlined key issues in relation to the social and economic regeneration of interface communities which had been identified through interviews with statutory agency representatives.

The second presentation, by Paul Donnelly (BIP Development Worker), summarised the findings of a recent survey of Belfast Interface Project membership needs, and compared the issues raised with those which had been highlighted through a similar study in the mid-1990s. (See article elsewhere in this issue).

The findings showed that interface communities continue to experience high levels of disadvantage in terms of restricted access to facilities and services, economic and environmental blight and lack of adequate support for community groups, for example in providing services for young people.

At the same time, the presentations appeared to show a divergence between the views of statutory agency representatives and of community groups in relation to the quality, relevance and accessibility of some statutory services and resources for interface communities.

After the presentations and a plenary Q & A, conference delegates joined small group workshops. The theme of the workshops was 'What are the key relationships that need to be addressed in promoting the regeneration of Belfast's interface communities?' with supplementary questions 'How, in practice, can you help to progress this work?' and 'How could others help to progress this work?'



Chris O'Halloran chairs Q&A with conference presenters Paul Donnelly (left) and Pat McGinn (right). photo: Frankie Quinn



Conference workshop. photo: Frankie Quinn



Conference delegates review workshop notes. photo: Frankie Quinn

Discussion in the workshops was lively and workshop groups highlighted a wide range of relationships which they felt were key to the regeneration of Belfast's interface areas. These included both inter and intra-community relationships and relationships with a broad spectrum of statutory, voluntary and funding agencies.

A recurring theme across the workshops was in relation to the future sustainability of community activity within interface communities, against a backdrop of cuts in statutory agency budgets. A number of groups highlighted what they viewed as the absence of a community infrastructure sustainability plan: 'We have more pilots than the RAF', as one participant commented, 'but successful pilots still have difficulty securing further funding'. Many groups highlighted the issue that support for work with young people in their interface areas is essential, but were concerned that there did not appear to be sufficient funding from BELB to support this work to the extent that is needed. Similarly, there was concern that BRO's new

Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, without extra resources, may not provide the support needed to really promote the regeneration of interface communities as required.

Other issues raised included the need for political leadership and the importance of supporting ex-combatants and paramilitary organisations in moving away from violence, as well as the need for more information-exchange regarding effective practice and the value of networking opportunities such as the conference itself.

During the final plenary session, facilitated by Deirdre MacBride, some further issues were raised. A number of participants commented on the under-representation by statutory agency representatives at the conference, despite the fact that many had been invited including all of those whom Pat McGinn had interviewed. (We'd like to thank those statutory representatives who did attend and participated fully). The issue of 'burnout' was also raised by a number of both community and statutory representatives, in relation to

their experience of working to address the impact of, and to minimise, interface tensions and conflict.

Finally, and significantly, the following (summarised) point was made from the floor: 'The process of coming out of conflict is a massive endeavour for our society, and the building of effective relationships is a key element within that process. We don't yet have an agreed structure through which to build those relationships. Instead what we do have is a haphazard approach compartmentalized into spaces of violence. We should not be surprised therefore that the language of social and economic regeneration does not include a thought-out approach to peace-building or to a concept of Belfast as a shared city. We need to create agreed structures to facilitate dialogue and the building of new relationships, and then start problem-solving.'

The conference was followed by BIP's 4th Annual General Meeting. A conference report will follow in due course.

## A fond farewell

By Paul Donnelly

Belfast Interface Project would like to say a slightly belated but fond farewell to Ann McGuinness. From December 1999 to October 2004 Ann was the Development Worker for Parkside Community Association based in 'The Tree House' off the Limestone Road in North Belfast.

After five years of excellent work, Ann has quite dramatically changed direction and left her post in order to study full-time for the National Diploma in Horticulture at Greenmount College in Antrim - literally moving to new pastures!

Anyone visiting Parkside during Ann's time as Development Worker would have been impressed at the sheer volume of human traffic to and from 'The Tree House', as people

called with requests for advice on a host of issues or kids enquired about the next residential, swimming trip or play they were to produce and act in. In between all this mayhem, Parkside Community Association delivered education and training programmes, from computer skills to alternative therapies, and produced two films on the history of the community and young people in the area.

Recycling schemes were initiated and at the time of writing an environmental courtyard is being constructed in the area, which will be completed by December 2004. The local kids in particular embarked on environmental schemes with vigour, helping to construct and distribute 150 hanging baskets to homes in the area to brighten the streets.

Reflecting on her time at Parkside, Ann recounted the difficult times that the community has faced. In 2000 and 2001 there were periods of daily rioting around the

Limestone Road with Parkside being affected by disturbances occurring on Christmas Day of both years. That violence has lessened today and Ann's final piece of work has been to oversee the establishment, with the support of the International Fund for Ireland, of a three year single identity Community Relations and Development Programme, to which a new appointment is currently being made.

Ann's final observation was about the pressures that community and interface workers are under and she says, 'Community workers don't have a long life span here. We need better support from statutory agencies or people will continue to leave the work'. Having made such a valuable contribution to Parkside and building relationships with other communities, Ann is well placed to comment. As she moves on BIP would again like to acknowledge Ann for her work and to wish her well for the future.

# BIP MEMBERSHIP SURVEY By Paul Donnelly

In May and June of 2004 the Belfast Interface Project conducted an extensive membership survey. The survey's remit was to gather perceptions as to how conditions have changed in interface communities over the past decade, and for the membership to outline how BIP might better support their work.

The first section, *An Audit of Interface Issues* examines perceptions of conditions at interfaces across Belfast and perceptions of change over the last ten years in interface communities across Belfast. Questions were based around the following themes:

- Physical attractiveness of the interface areas
- Levels of social vibrancy
- Levels of economic vibrancy
- How communities have come to terms with the legacies of the past
- Freedom of movement in accessing facilities and services
- Levels of tension, intimidation and violence
- Levels of inter-community dialogue between areas

Section Two, *Members' Needs*, contains a further eleven qualitative questions examining what support BIP can give to membership groups in key areas of work. Could BIP support

groups to address the legacies of the past or to improve freedom of movement in accessing facilities and services in interface areas? Later questions examined the training which groups receive to develop their skills for their work, their key providers, and any gaps in provision that members reported.

## SOME FINDINGS:

Twenty five surveys were completed with 44% identifying their community as mainly unionist/protestant, 24% as mainly nationalist/catholic and 32% as mixed. However of that 32%, all but one group said they were 'mixed but segregated' eg. Duncairn or Greater Springfield area. Additionally, 80% of respondents said there had been an increase in ethnic minority representation within their community or across the city generally.

Examining the *Audit of Interface Issues*, consistent themes arise across the city concerning the conditions within and between interface communities. There is a strong and frequently repeated perception that statutory agencies have neglected interface communities and have failed to deliver effective services and support to these areas.

Taking Question 1a as an example:  
*In your view how would you rate the attractiveness of the physical environment in interface areas throughout Belfast? (Where 10 is very high and 1 is very low)*

The responses resulted in an average of 3.28 as the level of physical attractiveness of interfaces. In terms of themes arising from the question, 52% of the groups cited the physical blight of the areas and 60% said that physical conditions were adversely affected by statutory 'neglect' or 'abandonment'. This criticism of the statutes was a feature in response to many questions and has been a significant outcome of the survey.

Other key findings were as follows:

- 20% identified antisocial behaviour as negatively impacting upon the social vibrancy of their communities.
- Economic vibrancy was felt to be very low in interface communities across

the city, with 60% identifying lack of investment at interfaces as a major problem.

- The issue of the extent to which interface communities have come to terms with the legacies of the past proved challenging for very many groups. If there was a point of concurrence it was that all appear to find this a difficult but very important area of work.
- The main theme arising from the issue of freedom of movement in accessing services and facilities was that fear is still a dominant factor in influencing patterns of movement and access.
- In relation to levels of inter-community tension/intimidation and violence, members reported that these fluctuate depending on area, the time of year and the bigger political picture, although a consistent ongoing level of tension seems to be the norm.

- 56% of respondents cited that levels of inter-community dialogue are higher than ten years ago. However there remain areas where it is very low or non-existent.

## Members Needs:

The clearest and most consistent theme arising from Section Two, whilst there is a great deal of information in this section, is that BIP's membership sees the future role of BIP as a lobbying organisation on behalf of members, providing a collective voice to government, its agencies and to the political structures.

At twenty pages long and taking an average of two hours to complete with assistance, the survey has produced a substantial amount of information and will strongly influence the development and direction of BIP. The final survey report will be available in late November 2004.

# CROWN Project: Supporting community development in East Belfast By John McQuillan

The CROWN Project (Community Regeneration of Woodstock Neighbourhoods) aims to assist local people in tackling local problems, particularly East Belfast interface difficulties, through the community development process. This process embraces the principles of democracy, fairness and empowerment. It is funded by the Community Foundation (NI) under the EU's measure 2.7, Developing Weak Community Infrastructure.

We offer practical assistance in some of the following ways:

- Facilitate local people working together on common issues and projects.

- Assist in devising and implementing action plans in co-operation with local groups.
- Facilitate an election of officers e.g. a Chair person, vice chair, secretary, treasurer etc, to serve as office bearers for the group.
- Arrange guest speakers, study visits and meetings with established community groups, statutory agencies and politicians.
- Access to training in committee roles and responsibilities etc.
- Provide guidance and assistance in producing funding applications.
- Engage in dialogue with our neighbouring community to build trust and understanding between our communities.

There is little evidence of any

history of community development in these working-class unionist communities. Many local residents lack the confidence or skills to articulate the needs of their community to key decision-makers. Yet there are many local unmet needs. It is deprivation that is the common factor in unionist interface communities and their neighbouring nationalist counterparts. Deprivation measures (Noble) in these disadvantaged areas are highly ranked, particularly in poor health indicators, educational under attainment, child poverty and negative environmental factors.

The CROWN Project offers local people help to enable them to become more active in their communities. One of the main aims of community development is to give people a greater say

in running their own lives and communities. An individual tackling the system merely acts alone, however when people from a constituted community group act collectively they are much more likely to become an effective force in achieving positive change.

Local people can develop solutions to their problems by working together.

The CROWN Project is here to help tackle some local challenges and enhance the quality of life of local people. John McQuillan is the Community Development Worker with the CROWN Project. CROWN Project is based on the top floor of 113a Woodstock Road. They can be contacted on 9045 1680 or at crownproject@utvinternet.com.

## interface profile



Frankie Brennan from Short Strand Community Forum.

**FRANKIE BRENNAN**  
POST: My full-time job is as Employment Development Worker with Short Strand Community Forum. I am also Development Worker for South and East Belfast Community Restorative Justice and a management committee member of Belfast Interface Project.

**YOUR COMMUNITY:** Short Strand is a small republican/nationalist community in East Belfast. It has an excellent community infrastructure and a population of 2,500, which is steadily increasing. However, there is an acute housing shortage and community workers are presently in negotiations with various property developers to address this.

**YOUR DAY:** To use an old cliché, 'there's not enough hours in the day' to deal with community issues. As a member of Belfast Interface Project I am very much involved in interface issues. A lot of this work involves engaging young people

in dialogue and explaining how communities are adversely affected by inter-community conflict. There are numerous projects taking place in the community in relation to conflict resolution, single identity and citizenship. Groundwork has also played a huge part in getting young people involved in environmental programmes to upgrade the physical landscape. As a Community Restorative Justice practitioner I also deal with various disputes/problems within my own community. These can range from neighbour disputes to antisocial behaviour. Then finally there's my full-time job, which is to provide a service to the unemployed.

**LOW POINTS:** In May 2002 serious interface violence erupted in the Short Strand. This was a low point for my community with nightly rioting and community relations at an all time low. However, we somehow got through this period and are now building up relationships through excellent work by community workers and voluntary organisations.

**GOOD PRACTICE:** In July 2003 an inter-community contact group was established to monitor and curtail interface conflict (contact was maintained through a mobile phone network). To date this mechanism has been a great success and violence has fallen dramatically. (At this point I must congratulate Mediation NI, BIP and TIDES

for their hard work and commitment to this process). Although we have a long way to go we feel that things are beginning to move in a positive direction.

**WAY AHEAD:** All over Belfast it appears that communities are trying to find solutions to interface conflict and contentious marches. This is an encouraging development and the very fact that it is happening so early in the year is a positive step. There appears to be a consensus in both communities that dialogue is the only way forward. However, it is ironic that when communities have gone the extra mile Government cannot acknowledge this and keep resources where they are most needed, instead of cutting back.

**HIGH POINTS:** Witnessing young people get a second chance to fulfil their full potential, especially those who have fallen through the net and who believed the system failed them. Also, experiencing the strong community spirit, which has always been prevalent in Short Strand and which has helped people through very difficult times.

**HOBBIES:** Politics, reading, keeping fit and helping to ensure Guinness remains a best seller.