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Following three decades of experience and expertise at different levels of the planning system – involving local regeneration projects; comprehensive development schemes; area and sub-regional plans, and the Regional Strategy – we would identify a set of problems with the existing planning model that impacts negatively on peace-building, including:

1. its tendency in the past to 'airbrush' out the relevance of division and segregation to the planning process;
2. its limited inclination to recognize openly the difference among ethnic, neutral, shared, and cosmopolitan spaces in a conflict-ridden society;
3. its limited capacity to challenge the 'diseconomies of conflict' that often sees the duplication of services and amenities within each sectarian bloc;
4. its concentration on 'land use planning' – a concern about where to zone particular development activity, and focus largely on the physical aspects of infrastructure and development;
5. its limited ability to nest local neighbourhood planning and regeneration strategies within the statutory and strategic planning framework to afford such local effort the appropriate authority;
6. the potential for major sectarian blocs to use planning to carve up 'spheres of influence', and thereby inhibit the evolution of a more integrated and shared society; and
7. the difficulty encountered in achieving inclusive and participatory forms of plan-making that embrace diverse voices that transcend barriers of gender, age, ethnicity, and disability.

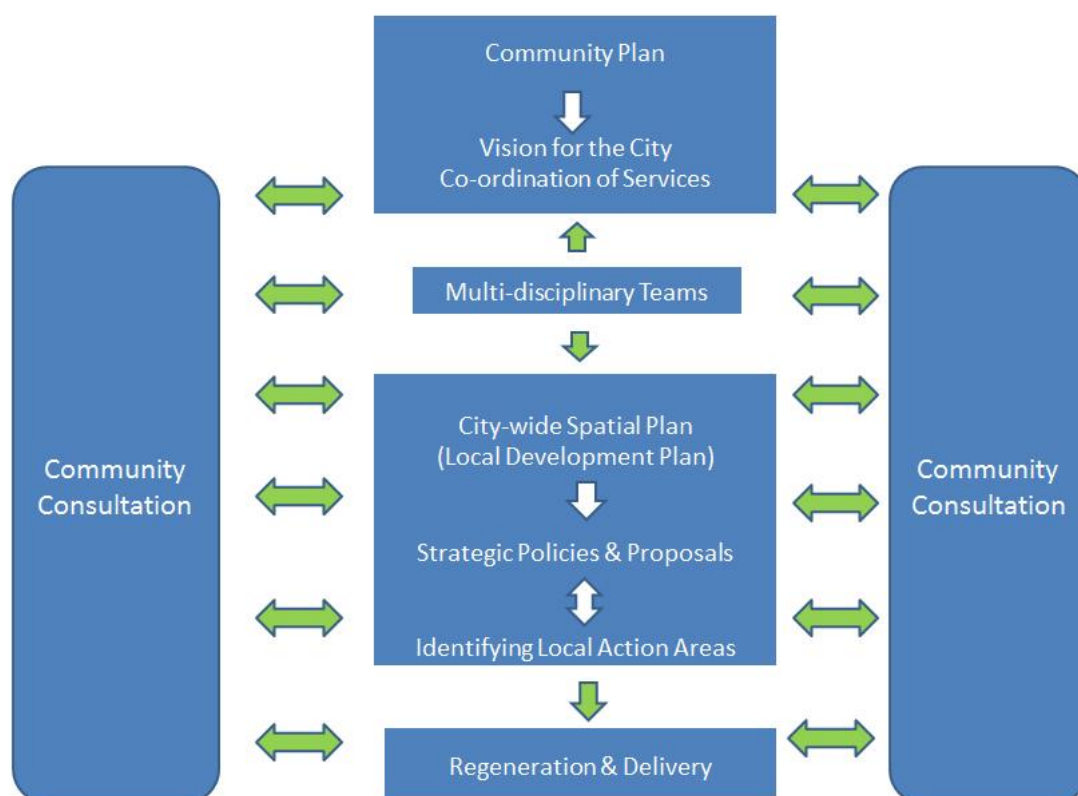
With its partnership between Queen's University's Institute of Spatial and Environmental Planning and the Planning Service's Planning Policy Unit, the project *Planning for Spatial Reconciliation* works in partnership with all stakeholders to help:

- (a) develop the institutional capacities to re-think and reorganize planning to make it fit for purpose in building a more inclusive, equitable, sustainable and peaceful society.
- (b) specifically, help to make the building of a shared society a central feature of the new community planning and spatial planning; and
- (c) promote the linkage between local neighbourhood planning, particularly in the most isolated and disadvantaged communities, and the broader planning process, since a sustainable peace depends on the connection of such areas into the wider society.

Through the introduction of **community planning** and **spatial planning**, there is the prospect of an innovative approach that gets beyond 'land use planning' to a more comprehensive and holistic model, linking the physical with the social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects of development. Importantly, this new planning approach offers the prospect of seeing more clearly the spatial *needs* and *impact* of all other policy sectors, such as health, education, and social services.

The new planning model at local government level offers the potential to take forward a more integrated form of planning. In contrast to the traditional land-use approach which focuses largely on zoning, the new spatial planning model is about creating place. In other words, it starts by asking what sort of place we want to create and then goes on to develop policies and proposals to make that happen. Importantly, this requires a more comprehensive approach that includes those aspects of public policy and practice that have traditionally been developed quite separately. For example, key spatial aspects of education and health are not integrated into mainstream planning at present. More than this, new areas of public policy in Northern Ireland such as 'good relations', are deemed to be beyond the remit of contemporary development planning. The new model of planning offers an opportunity not only to connect spatial planning to community planning and regeneration but also to factor in key aspects of other policy areas into local government place making and service delivery.

By way of illustration for Belfast, the Diagram below, illustrates the structure of a possible process. The top box centres on the City's Community Plan. This new activity provides the Council with an opportunity to set out a long term vision for the city and to put in place arrangements for a more co-ordinated delivery of services. And all of this needs to be shaped by multi-disciplinary teams working with a comprehensive community consultation process. However, for the first time in recent history, this new facility will allow the Council to take responsibility for shaping the future of the city as well as co-ordinating and indeed integrating the delivery of services.



Ideally, the Spatial Plan for the city can and should be developed alongside the Community Plan. In the past, land-use plans for the city such as the Belfast Urban Area Plan and currently the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, have focused on setting out policies for retailing, offices and so on as well as identifying and zoning sites for development. The new spatial planning that the legislation facilitates encourages a different approach. Firstly, it requires a strong link to the City's Community Plan, particularly its vision. Secondly and relatedly, it asks what aspects of the Community Plan should be expressed in the Spatial Plan. This is particularly important because the Spatial Plan for the city will have statutory status. However, while both the Community Plan and the Spatial Plan need to set out broad strategic aims for the city, they should also identify areas of the city that require local action plans. Again too, good practice from elsewhere would suggest that the City's strategic policy aims should relate strongly to local actions. Similarly, a strategic, 'good relations' policy aim to create safe, welcoming and neutral environments would also be captured in local action plans.

We think that the current changes to the planning system that are proposed by the NI Assembly's Planning Bill do not take the considerations described above into account sufficiently. We would be happy to engage with the committee's members on their suggested changes and make use of the opportunities provided to contribute to the decision making process.

Yours sincerely,

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