

**Ballynageigh Community Development Association,
Response to TBUC Inquiry by OFMDFMNI Assembly Committee**

Ballynafeigh Community Development Association (BCDA) welcomes this opportunity provided by the committee to input into this Inquiry.

Background to BCDA

Ballynafeigh Community Development Association (BCDA) was established in 1974 during that turbulent period in Northern Ireland when so many people were hastening to the perceived safety of living with their 'own kind' in an endemic movement towards social separation which prevails to this day.

Conversely, many Ballynafeigh residents came together to protect the mixed/shared nature of their district, a brave endeavour because, although the promotion of mixing and sharing of people and place were ideas that they themselves valued, these beliefs were out of kilter with what was actually happening on the ground. Nevertheless, BCDA's founding goals were to foster good community relations, a sense of belonging to a diverse neighbourhood and to promote the principles and practice of community development.

BCDA's Learning from Shared Neighbourhood Work

BCDA has also long recognised that shared neighbourhoods like Ballynafeigh don't happen by accident. It is not enough to build housing estates and designate them as 'shared' or to create a 'charter' for a shared neighbourhood and ask residents to 'sign up to' or 'buy into' it.

Rather, a great deal of conscious effort and careful people investment must be expended to ensure that the essential network of relationships between individuals and groups are developed and sensitively supported in order to generate and maintain these shared living spaces.

Furthermore, perhaps the most significant of the lessons learned from all BCDA's work on both shared neighbourhood reinforced in our emerging interdependence

work to date, has been that although communities and neighbourhoods can be shared, this does not make dealing with the issues they face any less difficult.

Conversely, BCDA has also found that solutions to these difficulties can arise directly from the daily operational infrastructure of a shared neighbourhood like Ballynifeigh, often unexpectedly, and that these can quickly alleviate or suggest alternative approaches to dealing with seemingly intransigent problems.

The skill is in recognising these opportunities as and when they arise, so that they can be acted on immediately. Practitioners operating in a shared neighbourhood context to deliver community development initiatives, must be capable of empathetically responding to this complexity. Critically, they must also be able to foster and support the development of crucial personal relationships, those all important social bonds representing the social capital of a shared neighbourhood; a process which BCDA characterises as the ‘generation and regeneration of the social fabric of the district’

Points to the Inquiry

- BCDA is very concerned that the TBUC Initiative, while acknowledging shared spaces and places, does not provide for the sustaining and regeneration of existing shared neighbours. There is much attention paid to establishing new shared neighbourhoods and urban villages but no attention paid to the learning from existing practice and the networks that have been built over time.
- BCDA is Pessimistic about the impact of TBUC because the real impacts of previous government initiatives such as Shared Future and Cohesion Sharing and Integration amounted to nothing. TBUC has been “live” now for around 18 months and has yet to deliver on its grand promises. We fear that the policy document may be yet another set of gestures without substance.
 - In our day to day work with groups on the ground we are still encountering the contentious issues that have sustained and continue to sustain division and are in danger of sustaining the Conflict. This strongly indicates that the divisions in our society still run deep and are strongly felt. BCDA is greatly concerned by the

decreasing amount of funding which is available for peace and reconciliation work.

- All government, and especially Stormont, needs to be demonstrating a positive attitude of leadership. This would generate energy and morale around peace building and reconciliation and enable us as a society to move forward.

Katie Hanlon (Director)

Ballynafeigh Community Development Association

283 Ormeau Road

Belfast

BT7 3GG

02890491161

katie.hanlon@bcda.net