

Submitted to Display of Flags and Emblems - Call for Evidence
Submitted on 2026-08-21 00:30:06

Introduction

1 Confirmation of having read the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee's Privacy Notice.

I confirm that I have read the privacy notice.

2 What is your name?

Name:

[REDACTED]

3 What is your email address?

Email:

[REDACTED]

4 If you are providing a submission on behalf of an organisation or business, please state its name.

Organisation:

5 The Committee for Infrastructure has agreed to publish all responses as part of the survey results. If you would like to have your survey results anonymised and for us not to publish your name or organisation, please indicate so here.

I would like my views to be anonymous and understand that my name and organisation details will be withheld, along with any identifiers in the response, but my views will still be published.

Clause 1: Removal of flags or emblems in the public interest

6 Do you agree with Clause 1 of the Bill?

Yes

7 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I am a resident of the Orangefield area and would like to raise a concern regarding the flags that have been erected along Houston Park.

Under normal circumstances, flags do not extend the full length of Houston Park. They typically only go as far as the shops before stopping. This year, however, the situation appears to be different, particularly in light of the potential development of football pitches within the park.

There is a perception among some local residents that the extension of the flags further along the park may be intended to mark territory. This perception has been reinforced by comments made in local Facebook groups, including suggestions that residents will have more to worry about than a few flags in the street, apparently in reference to the proposed development strategy for the football pitches.

The situation has subsequently escalated. Some local residents expressed opposition to having the flags positioned directly along the frontage of the park, and a number of flags were removed. Following this, there appeared to be a confrontational response, with groups of individuals approaching residents and requesting access to doorbell camera footage in an attempt to establish who had removed them. This has understandably caused concern among some members of the community.

I appreciate that people have different views regarding flags and their significance. However, Houston Park is a public space intended for everyone in the community, and I am concerned that the presence of flags along the park, particularly well beyond 12 July, may contribute to increased tensions within an already divided area.

Given the timing and the ongoing discussions surrounding the potential development of the football pitches, the situation is understandably causing some residents to question whether the flags are contributing to a heightened sense of territorial division within the neighbourhood.

Could you please clarify what the relevant guidance or policy is regarding the erection and duration of flags in this area? In particular, how long are these flags permitted to remain in place, and is there a specific date by which they are expected to be removed?

I would appreciate clarification on this matter, as well as any information regarding who is responsible for monitoring the situation and ensuring that public spaces remain welcoming and accessible to all residents.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these concerns.

Clause 2: Sensitive places

8 Do you agree with Clause 2 of the Bill?

Yes

9 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

Orangefield Park is, by its very nature, a shared communal space and a public park intended for the use and enjoyment of the whole community. It should therefore be treated as a place for everyone, regardless of background, beliefs or political views.

The Bill's reference to shared communal places, including public parks, is particularly relevant in this context. The purpose of such provisions appears to recognise that public spaces should remain accessible and welcoming to all members of the community, rather than becoming associated with or perceived as belonging to one particular group.

My concern is not simply about the presence of flags themselves, but about the circumstances, extent and duration of their display. When flags are erected along a public park, particularly during a period of heightened local tensions, there is a legitimate concern that this can create a perception that the space is being marked or claimed by one section of the community.

Orangefield Park is a shared community asset. The underlying principle should surely be that public parks remain genuinely shared spaces and are not allowed to become focal points for territorial marking or community division. I would welcome clarification on how this principle is being applied to Orangefield Park and what steps, if any, are being taken to ensure that the park remains a welcoming and shared space for the entire community. I would like to question why after decades of not having flags lining this street why it has been allowed to happen this year without consultation in the neighbourhood?

Clause 3: Procedure for / notification of, or giving views on, flags or emblems

10 Do you agree with Clause 3 of the Bill?

Yes

11 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

Orangefield Park belongs to the whole community. No individual group should be able to create the impression that a public park is their territory. I would therefore hope that the Department's assessment of the public interest and cultural identity protections will take into account the views of residents who feel that the nature or duration of a display is inconsistent with the park's status as a shared communal space.

I would also welcome clarification on when the proposed notification portal will become operational, how residents will be able to submit concerns, and how those submissions will be considered when determining whether a display is consistent with the relevant Code of Practice.

Clause 4: Code of Practice

12 Do you agree with Clause 4 of the Bill?

Not Answered

13 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I would therefore ask that the development of the Code of Practice specifically considers public parks such as Orangefield Park. A public park should remain a genuinely shared space, accessible and welcoming to everyone, and the guidance should provide clarity on how prolonged or extensive flag displays in such locations should be assessed.

The central issue for residents is that Orangefield Park is a park for everyone. The Code of Practice should ensure that this principle remains at the heart of how flags and emblems are managed in shared communal spaces.

Clause 5: Offence of obstructing the Department in removal of flag or emblem

14 Do you agree with Clause 5 of the Bill?

Unsure

15 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I would welcome clarification on:

- Who has the authority to require the removal of a flag or emblem under the proposed legislation.
- What process must be followed before a removal takes place.
- What safeguards will be in place to ensure that enforcement is proportionate and consistent.
- How residents can report concerns about obstruction, intimidation or attempts to prevent lawful enforcement.
- Whether specific guidance will be included in the Code of Practice regarding disputes arising from flag displays in public parks.

Clause 6: Request for assistance from police

16 Do you agree with Clause 6 of the Bill?

Yes

17 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

In the case of Orangefield Park, there have already been concerns about confrontational behaviour surrounding the removal of flags, including individuals seeking doorbell-camera footage in an attempt to identify those responsible. This demonstrates why clear procedures and appropriate safeguards are necessary when dealing with disputes over flags in shared public spaces.

Clause 7: Interpretation

18 Do you agree with Clause 7 of the Bill?

Unsure

19 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

Ultimately, the legislation should provide a clear and consistent framework that balances the right to cultural expression with the principle that public spaces such as Orangefield Park are for everyone.

Clause 8: Commencement

20 Do you agree with Clause 8 of the Bill?

Unsure

21 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible:

I broadly agree with Clause 8 and the proposed timescale for bringing the provisions of the Bill into operation. However, I believe it is important that there is sufficient preparation, guidance and public awareness before the provisions take effect.

Clause 9: Short title

22 Do you agree with Clause 9 of the Bill?

Unsure

23 Please provide information to support your answer here

Accessible: