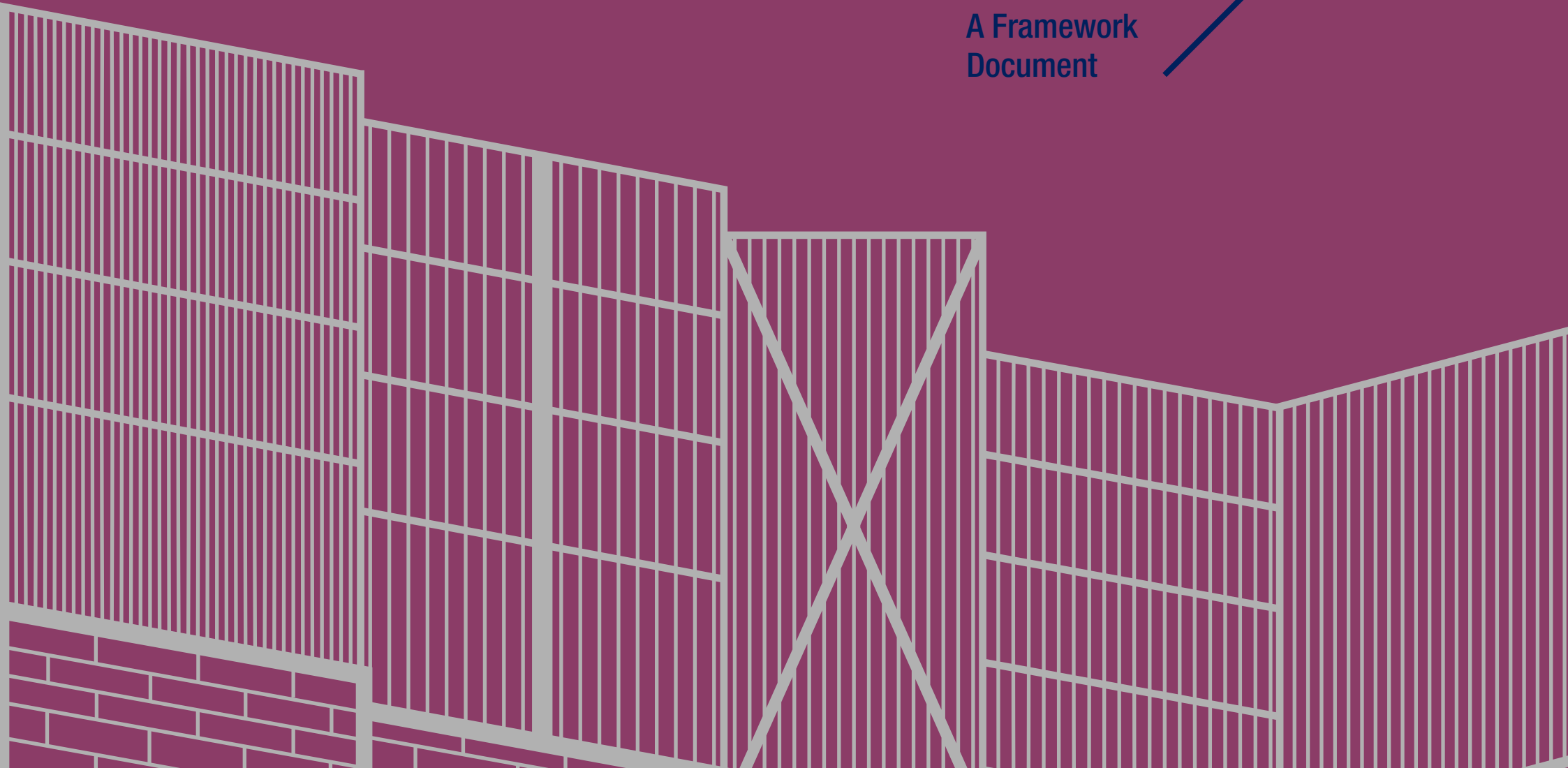


# INTERFACES PROGRAMME

A Framework  
Document





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# INTRODUCTION

**In May 2013 the Northern Ireland Executive set out a broad strategy that reflected its commitment to improving community relations and building a united and shared society in Northern Ireland.**

What became known as the 'Together: building a united community' or 'T:buc' Strategy seeks to offer a roadmap towards a transformed and more shared society in the future. The T:buc Strategy outlined a vision based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and the need for reconciliation. Through 'the Strategy' it set out a number of actions designed to tackle sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance while seeking to address division, hate and separation.

The T:buc Strategy identified a number of headline actions that would provide innovative approaches to building a united, shared and reconciled community. The 7 headline actions were:

- Establish 10 new shared education campuses;
- Get 10,000 young people, not in education, employment or training, a place on the United Youth volunteering programme;
- Establish 10 new shared housing schemes
- Develop 4 urban village schemes
- Develop a significant programme of cross-community sporting events;
- Remove interface barriers by 2023; and
- Pilot 100 shared summer schools by 2015



The Strategy outlined how Government, community and individuals would work together to build a united community and achieve change against the following key priorities:

- 1. Our children and young people;**
- 2. Our shared community;**
- 3. Our safe community; and**
- 4. Our cultural expression.**

Under the safe community priority, a 'shared aim' was articulated:

*'to create a community where everyone feels safe in moving around and where life choices are not inhibited by fears around safety'.*

In order to build a safer community, a number of actions were proposed including to:

*'create a 10-year programme to reduce, and remove by 2023, all interface barriers'.*

As part of the over-arching architecture to deliver against the commitments outlined in the T:buc Strategy, the Department of Justice agreed to lead the strand of work aimed at securing the reduction and removal of all interface barriers.

# T:BUC DOJ-LED INTERFACES PROGRAMME

**When justice functions were devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly in April 2010, the newly created Department of Justice took over responsibility for 59 physical interface structures across Northern Ireland.**

These physical barriers, sometimes referred to as 'peace walls', had been put up between 1969 to 2008 in order to protect people and property from attacks motivated by sectarian inter-community violence and terrorism. The justification for the erection of such structures, as currently expressed in the Justice & Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 s29 and s32 is 'the preservation of peace and the maintenance of order'.

This is a high legal standard to achieve and maintain given that the erection of such structures involves the requisitioning and holding of land, the closing of roads and the maintenance of such structures for as long as is deemed necessary.

The following desired outcome and principles set the work of the Interfaces Team within the DoJ into the wider context of T:buc and the draft 'Programme for Government'. The aims of the Programme were agreed by the Interfaces Programme Board - an inter-agency body set up to oversee the work of the T:buc Interfaces Programme:

**Strategic Outcome:** We have a safe community where we respect the rule of law and each other

**High Level Target:** Remove, by 2023, all interface barriers

## **PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING WORK TO REMOVE INTERFACE STRUCTURES:**

- We will seek to secure maximum community consent and support from people who live on both sides of an interface structure.
- We will take account of the local context.
- We will work with communities to create the conditions within which division and segregation can be addressed.
- We will support local communities in identifying the benefits of change and in coming together to produce a plan to reduce/remove interface barriers.
- We will ensure value for money from resources.

# CONTEXT

## A SHORT HISTORY

Interface barriers in Northern Ireland started out as make-shift temporary barricades between communities. At some locations these barriers were fortified by the army. Over time, the nature of the structures changed from temporary fencing to more permanent installations. In 2019, the DoJ-owned interface structures vary significantly in size and nature. Such structures include everything from a 90 metre long 3 metre high red brick wall – sometimes referred to as the ‘million brick wall’ – to a fence with a pedestrian access gate that is locked open. The first interface structure appeared in 1969 at Bombay Street near what is now Cupar Way in the Falls / Shankill area of West Belfast.

The last structure erected was in 2008 in the grounds of Hazelwood School, an integrated Primary School in North Belfast. Interface structures are found mainly in Belfast and Derry/ Londonderry. Some further interface barriers were erected in the late 1990s, early 2000s in the Portadown and Lurgan area as a result of parade-related inter-community tension and violence.







## INTERFACES IN NUMBERS

As of 2019, there are 46 of the original 59 interface barriers (transferred to DoJ in 2010) remaining. A further 14 structures owned by the Housing Executive (NIHE) fall within the scope of the T:buc Interfaces Programme. The HE structures are often integrated within or adjacent to DoJ-owned structures, or vice versa, creating an obvious synergy for partnership working. The Belfast Interface Project (BIP) produced a publication in 2012 'Belfast Interfaces; security barriers and defensive use of space'. This research publication sought to list those interface barriers existing at that time, 99 in total in Belfast.

This was updated in 2017 to include a regional perspective, 'Interface Barriers, Peacelines and Defensive Architecture' which lists 116 such barriers in total across Northern Ireland. The reasons for the apparent discrepancy between the Department and BIP's figures comes down to differences in interpretation over what constitutes an interface and whether structures should be clustered and counted as one or as more separate barriers. BIP also lists structures owned by other public bodies and in private ownership as well as derelict lands adjacent to interface barriers.

**A list of DoJ-owned and Housing Executive owned structures is provided at appendix (i)**

# STRATEGIC CONTEXT

**Whilst the T:buc Strategy articulated an aspiration to remove all interface barriers across Northern Ireland within a 10-year time frame, the T:buc Strategy also highlighted the complexity and challenge that such an ambitious goal would present.**

In seeking to give effect to the aspiration of T:buc, DoJ has developed a partnership approach seeking to engage positively with residents, local community stakeholders, elected representatives and colleagues in other Departments and agencies with a part to play in the task of seeing legacy interface structures in Northern Ireland reduced or removed.

To develop a plan of action for removing interfaces DoJ addressed a number of questions to inform our work. In doing so, we sought to anticipate the reactions – positive and negative - when espousing the need to see interface structures removed as a sign of community reconciliation twenty years on from the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. At a basic level, we asked ourselves the why, what, how, where, when and who questions of interface removal work and came up with the following answers:



## WHY REMOVE INTERFACE BARRIERS?

The T:buc Strategy in 2013 created a cross-party political commitment to see interfaces removed as part of the process of embedding peace through working towards a shared future. Every interface wall or fence is unique. The reasons why it was erected and the history of inter-community tension and violence in its vicinity creates a unique backdrop that will influence the preparedness of local residents, business owners, community and elected representatives to see the structure reduced or removed.

In articulating the opportunities that could be created by the reduction or removal of an interface structure, DoJ will seek to communicate the benefit of doing so in terms of:

- the potential improvement in the local physical amenity;
- the contribution to the aesthetics of the area;
- the scope for improved access to services; and
- the opportunities for greater contact between local communities on either side of an interface, where one still exists.



## WHAT DOES DOJ DO TO ASSIST INTERFACE BARRIER REMOVAL AND HOW DOES IT DO IT?

DoJ accepts that every interface structure is unique. We also understand that those most affected by any decision to reduce or remove a structure are likely to be those living in closest proximity. Over time; development, dereliction, the creation of buffer zones, alternative land use and demographic change have meant that a relatively small number of interfaces provide a classic dividing line whereby the homes of residents from different communities back on to one another.

In order to understand each interface and to work with local people through the process towards reduction or removal of the interface, the Department's Interfaces Team can carry out a number of tasks to inform their work, some of these include:

- informally mapping each interface location to understand the background to the erection of the interface structure, the extent of cross-community dialogue locally, the capacity of local community development architecture and the extent of funding interventions seeking to secure socio-economic change in the area;
- the completion of security assessments in partnership with the PSNI to assess the prevailing level of inter-community interface tension and violence at specific locations in order to understand the impact the reduction or removal of an interface structure would have;
- surveys conducted by location, and repeated as necessary, to assess any attitudinal change towards potential interface reduction or removal;
- collaboration with agencies working to address social, economic, physical and cross community factors affecting local interface communities to assess the role such work and developments could have on the prospects for securing community consent towards interface reduction or removal;
- discussion with local elected and community representatives and residents – starting with those most affected (typically, but not always, those living in closest proximity to an interface structure) to assess the appetite locally for potential interface reduction or removal;




- working through existing fora – such as International Fund for Ireland (IFI) Peace Walls Programme funded Groups, Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships and Partners and Communities Together (PACT) networks. Where appropriate community fora is absent, we will work to establish bespoke partnerships and liaise with local authority colleagues;
- generating potential options for physical change to aid discussion.
- seeking to achieve maximum consent from the local community to any proposed interface reduction or removal schemes. A first step in this process is to establish the make-up of the community affected by any proposed changes to an interface structure and the extent of any wider cross-section of interested stakeholders. Through discussions, preferences around the nature and scale of any changes are established. Cross-community dialogue is preferable but where this proves difficult, discussions with those affected on either side of an interface are progressed. Objections raised are considered and weighted. Steps to mitigate concerns are built into the changes proposed, whenever possible.



In considering options for change, four main alterations are usually possible, these are:

- **Remove** – complete removal of interface structure and reinstatement of the affected site;
- **Reduce** – partial removal or reduction (in the scale, height or nature of the interface);
- **Re-classification** – the formal re-designation of an interface fence for an alternative purpose, such as use as a perimeter fence by a local landowner;
- **Re-image** – interim changes to the interface structure.



Where appropriate, and to provide local residents with a degree of assurance, a risk-based aftercare package will be offered to local homeowners. This will entail the installation of protective measures such as the fitting of reinforced glass in windows. Other measures provided for under the Department's Aftercare Policy will be considered. Following the reduction or removal of a nearby interface structure, for a period of three years the Department will meet the costs of repairing damage caused to homes should they be damaged as a result of a sectarian hate crime.

With a commitment to make progress at interface locations, the Department will develop costed annual implementation plans to deliver a rolling schedule of interface removal, reduction, re-classification and re-imaging work across Northern Ireland and publish these online to complement this framework document. Where limited appetite exists to explore options for physical change, cross-community dialogue will be encouraged using a best practice community development model;

Against other competing demands for resources, the Department will seek to secure funds from the T:buc budget to achieve the strategic outcome sought.

In addition to the site specific actions listed above, the Department will commission bespoke research to inform wider considerations on relevant policy matters and conduct triennial surveys to assess the movement of public attitudes to the removal of peace walls by engaging residents living in interface communities.

DoJ will look to complement and enhance such work through the T:buc Interfaces Programme. Consideration will be given by other Government Departments and agencies on how their programmes and funding interventions will impact positively on the potential to secure community consent for interface reduction or removal work.

In this regard, we will seek to align with the broad good relations agenda progressed by The Executive Office – under T:buc-and work with DfC, NIHE, DfI, local Councils and other parts of the public sector to ensure that their plans for community development, job creation, housing, health provision and schooling have a positive bearing on meeting the needs of interface communities, whenever appropriate. Significant programmes of work and investment such as Neighbourhood Renewal, Early Intervention Programmes, Peace IV, Social Investment and the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme offer the prospect to change interface communities.

## WHERE?

Whilst community interfaces exist across Northern Ireland as a result of demographic settlement patterns along religious lines, the T:buc Interfaces Programme is solely concerned with the physical structures owned by DoJ and NIHE in the following areas:

- Belfast;
- Derry/Londonderry;
- Portadown; and
- Lurgan.

## WHO?

The T:buc Interfaces Programme is led by the Department of Justice, however, partnerships and collaborative working are vital to the broader success of the Programme. Key partners include; The Executive Office, Department for Communities, Department for Infrastructure, Housing Executive, Police Service of Northern Ireland, local Councils, local universities, the community and voluntary sector and organisations such as the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and Belfast Interface Project (BIP).

The Department recognises that good, direct and regular communication with local residents living in interface communities is critical to the success of any attempts to reduce or remove interface structures and we will work to develop relationships and effective communication tools to address local needs.



# CASE STUDIES

**Interface removal is rarely an event. Transformation of interfaces through re-imagining and reduction leading to removal has been led by a small staff team in DoJ over recent years.**

Through partnership working with a large cross-section of organisations and individuals keen to see physical legacy interface structures removed, there have been a number of changes and the following case studies illustrate that change is possible and positive:

## **CASE STUDY 1**

Crumlin Road wall removal scheme at Ardoyne

## **CASE STUDY 2**

Springhill Avenue wall removal and re-imagining scheme

## **CASE STUDY 3**

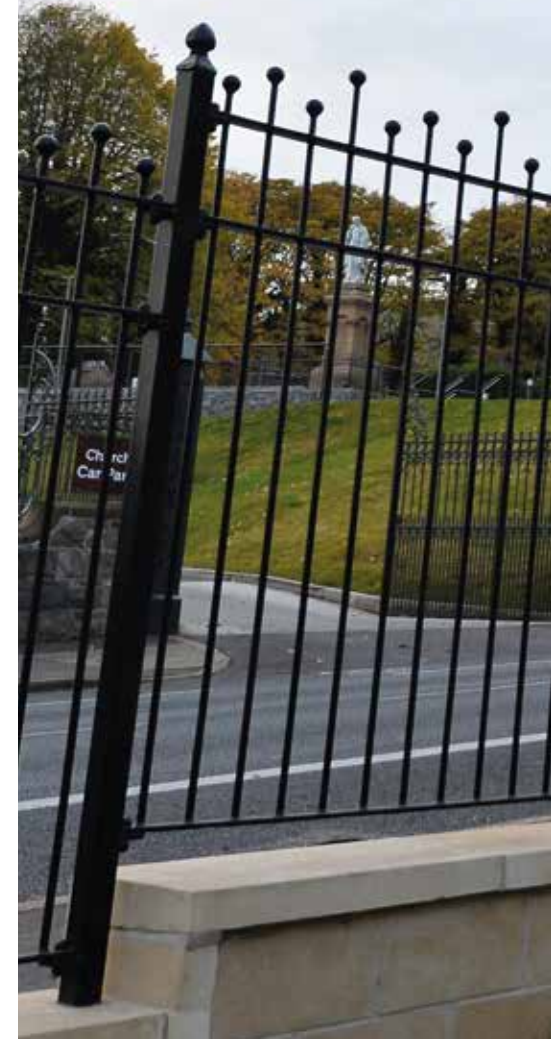
Townsend Street gate replacement

# CASE STUDY 1

## CRUMLIN ROAD WALL REMOVAL SCHEME AT ARDOYNE

In February 2016, 30 years after it was erected, the Housing Executive (NIHE) dismantled their interface barrier on the Crumlin Road removing the 8ft high brick structure to make way for railings and decorative panels. The wall which encloses part of the Ardoyne area was the first Housing Executive owned interface to be removed. The Housing Executive has 14 operational sites at 21 locations comprising of lands, walls and fences within Northern Ireland.

The wall was erected on the Crumlin Road in the mid-1980s at the same time as new social family homes were built. It was designed then to give protection to residents living at the interface during the Troubles. The community-led decision to transform the interface barrier came about after years of relationship building and talks within and between communities in north Belfast.







# CASE STUDY 2

## SPRINGHILL AVENUE WALL REMOVAL AND RE-IMAGING SCHEME

In September 2017 a 10ft high brick interface structure which had stood for nearly three decades was dismantled. The community-led decision to change this site was reached following careful relationship building initiatives facilitated by the Black Mountain Shared Space Project with support from the International Fund for Ireland, the Department of Justice and the Housing Executive.

This interface was erected in 1989 as a security measure to provide extra protection to residents and the nearby New Barnsley police station, dividing Springfield Road and Springhill Avenue. Transformation work on the site included the wall being replaced by a fence on which community art work is displayed, the facades and curtilages of two adjacent derelict houses were also improved as part of the scheme.









# CASE STUDY 3

## TOWNSEND STREET GATE REPLACEMENT

Townsend Street is adjacent to the Westlink and runs in a northerly direction between Divis Street and Peter's Hill. The gates are located between the Presbyterian Church and Townsend Enterprise Park approximately half way along Townsend Street. The existing gates were in poor condition and needed to be replaced so extensive consultation was carried out by the DOJ through the Falls and Shankill Forum around the potential design of the new gates.



Image of old gate

Considerable community benefits were associated with the preferred design including: improved visual amenity; enhanced health and safety through the installation of pedestrian access gates on both pavements; increase in passive surveillance due to the removal of concealed spaces which aided better visibility for pedestrians and motorists. There was also less opportunity for graffiti due to open nature of this design. The new gates were installed in June 2019 ahead of other environmental improvement works such as a public lighting upgrade; parking restrictions; public realm improvements and alcohol free signage delivered as a result of partnership working between the local community and statutory bodies.





PEDESTRIAN

# OUTCOMES-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY

**Having articulated the aspiration, and talked about the delivery methods being deployed to achieve the reduction and removal of physical interface structures across Northern Ireland, the purpose of such work is broader than the physical change being sought.**

In the context of the draft Programme for Government the Department will evaluate the success of the Interfaces Programme using 'Outcomes-Based Accountability'. The following measurements will be used to inform the key consideration behind this programme of work – is anyone better off?



## HOW MUCH?

- Number of interface structures removed. (Sources: DOJ/NIHE statistics);
- Number of interface structures reduced. (Sources: DOJ/NIHE statistics);
- Number of interface structures re-classified. (Sources: DOJ/NIHE statistics);
- Number of interfaces re-imaged. (Sources: DOJ/NIHE statistics);
- Number of interface structures subject to extended opening hours. (Sources: DOJ/NIHE statistics);
- Number of community engagement events held/supported (Sources: DOJ/NIHE statistics);
- Number of aftercare schemes completed. (Sources: DOJ/NIHE statistics).

## IS ANYONE BETTER OFF?

- % reduction in interface sectarian violence in hotspot/specific areas (Source: PSNI crime incident figures);
- % and number of respondents experiencing greater contact with representatives from the 'other' community. (Sources: Public Attitudes to Peace Walls Surveys; IFI Peace Walls Programme (PWP) Attitudinal Surveys);
- % and number of respondents who would like to see peace walls come down now or in the future. (Sources: Public Attitudes to Peace Walls Surveys; IFI (PWP) Attitudinal Surveys);
- % and number of respondents indicating confidence towards barrier removal and/or reduction. (Sources: Public Attitudes to Peace

Walls Surveys; IFI (PWP) Attitudinal Surveys);

- Numbers and % indicating positive attitudinal change towards the other community (Sources: Public Attitudes to Peace Walls Surveys; IFI (PWP) Attitudinal Surveys);
- % and number who take part in projects that are funded through good relations programmes in interface communities. (Sources: The Executive Office, Councils, IFI).

## HOW WELL?

- Extent of community consent secured (Sources: Survey results);
- Support from local elected reps (Sources: location specific DOJ/NIHE statistics);
- Timeframe for completion of work – delivery against projected timescale (Sources: DOJ/NIHE statistics);
- Complementary schemes delivered by partner agencies;
- % increase in access to services.





# CONCLUSION

**Interface removal work is a journey, not an event. It is however incumbent on Government to meet the aspirations of local people living in interface communities who want to see the gradual reduction and removal of legacy interface structures in areas where they continue to separate and blight the lives of local people.**

This framework document seeks to explain how DoJ will work with other Departments, agencies and within communities towards the goal of reduction or removal of interfaces by 2023. The framework is peppered with references to partnership working, as collaboration is key to the chances of success. We will work in good faith with all parties with a stake in this issue to deliver against the T:buc goal of a new, reconciled and shared society.

# APPENDIX (I)

## DOJ OWNED STRUCTURES (46)

### East Belfast (4)

1. Bryson Street/Thistle Court/Madrid Street;
2. Cluan Place/Clandeboye Gardens;
3. Mountpottinger Road/Woodstock Link;
4. Newtownards Road/Strand Walk.

### North Belfast (17)

5. Henry Street/Westlink;
6. North Queen Street/Duncairn Gardens;
7. Duncairn Gardens/South Side;
8. Duncairn Gardens/North Side;
9. Hallidays Road/Newington Street/Avenue;
10. Parkside Gardens/Alexandra Park;
11. Manor Street/Rosevale Street;
12. Rosapenna Street/Oldpark Road;
13. Woodvale/Holy Cross;
14. Alliance Avenue/Glenbryn Park;
15. Squire's Hill/Hazelbrook Drive;
16. Serpentine Gardens/Gunnell Hill;
17. Hazelwood Integrated Primary School;
18. Graymount;
19. Flax Street;
20. Somerdale Park & Donaldson Crescent;
21. Ardoyne Roundabout Shops.

### West Belfast (15)

22. Kirk Street/Springfield Road;
23. Cupar Way/Clonard;
24. Ardmoulin/Beverley Street;
25. Malinmore Park/Oranmore Drive;
26. Rodin Street/Westlink;
27. Springfield Park/Springmartin Road;
28. Moyard Parade;
29. Springmartin Road;
30. Cupar Street Upper;
31. Ballygomartin Road;
32. Lanark Way Gates;
33. Workman Avenue Gates;
34. North Howard Street gates;
35. Northumberland Street gates;
36. Townsend Street gates.

### Portadown (3)

37. Charles Street, Corcrain Road/Craigwell Avenue;
38. Corcrain Road/Obins Avenue;
39. Bann Boulevard.

### Lurgan (1)

40. Margretta Park.

### Derry/Londonderry(6)

41. Bishop Street;
42. Harding Street
43. Violet Street/Dungiven Road;
44. Tullyally/Currynerin;
45. Fountain Estate Gates (Bishop Gate);
46. Fences along Derry's Walls.



## THE HOUSING EXECUTIVE OWNED STRUCTURES (14)

### East Belfast

1. Madrid Street;
2. Strand Walk, Short Strand.

### North Belfast

3. North Queen Street;
4. Brougham Street;
5. York Street/Lancaster Street;
6. Halliday's Road/Duncairn Gardens (Tigers Bay);
7. Halliday's Road/Duncairn Gardens (New Lodge);
8. Alliance Avenue/Ardoyne Road;
9. Lower Oldpark.

### West Belfast

10. Cupar Way;
11. Crumlin Road, Woodvale;
12. Mountainview/Cairnmartin.

### South Belfast

13. Glenmachan Street Broadway.

### Derry/Londonderry

14. Fountain Estate/Bishop Street (L/Derry).



Young's Row, c.1922



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