

WOODVALE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Spring 2020



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The CMWorks team wish to thank all those who assisted in the planning, implementation and consultation process. Particular thanks to the Survey Advisory Team and to those Woodvale residents who gave so willingly of their time to participate in the survey and drop in sessions.

Section 1

1.1 Introduction

The Woodvale area of North Belfast runs from Ainsworth Avenue when the road changes from Shankill Road to Woodvale Road. The area includes the Maples, Ohio Street, Chief Rd and Cambrai Street. It is a densely-populated space (Woodvale ward's population as of June 2014 was 3,878 out of 1,840,498 in Northern Ireland overall) with high levels of deprivation. Woodvale areas 1, 2, and 3 are respectively ranked 57th, 66th and 27th most deprived in Northern Ireland out of 890 areas. Woodvale Area 3 (27th overall in Northern Ireland) is ranked 30th most deprived in income, 43rd most deprived in employment, and 5th most deprived in skills and learning. It is ranked as 46th and 76th in income affecting children and older people respectively. In addition to the high levels of deprivation it is also affected by a number of peace walls and structures that interface with Nationalist/Republican communities in North and West Belfast, including where it backs directly onto the Crumlin Road.

Previous work carried out between 2015-2018 based on a consultation and technical report resulted in environmental improvements and the re-imaging of a site, including a newly installed pedestrian gate at Columbia Street and nearby Rosebank Street out on to the Crumlin Road.

In 2019, The Department of Justice (DoJ) as the lead Department in regard to the NI Executive's commitment to remove peace walls by 2023, commissioned engagement and consultation sessions to provide opportunities for local people within the Woodvale area to express their views about the opening of the newly installed pedestrian gate from the Woodvale area (Columbia Street) out on to the Crumlin Road. Their opinions were also sought on the potential to replace the two barriers in Flax Street on the other side of the Crumlin Road with an automated gate with CCTV coverage.

In relation to both of these gates DOJ works in collaboration with a wide range of community stakeholders including representatives from the Twaddell Ardoyne Shankill Communities In Transition (TASCIT). The consultation and engagement process was planned and facilitated with an Advisory Group comprising representatives from DOJ and TASCIT.

1.2 Methodology

CMWorks was engaged to carry out the process necessary to complete the technical requirements for information gathering and to ensure that authentic opportunities to understand the responses, concerns and aspirations of diverse stakeholders were heard and reflected in the report.

The parameters of the consultation areas were the Woodvale community located in Rosebank, Columbia, Leopold and Cambrai Streets and Disraeli Court. The addresses selected were based on a recent environmental safety assessment carried out by the PSNI and DoJ in the area including homes that might be most affected by the potential opening of the Columbia St gate.

Following extensive consultation with Advisory Group members, a questionnaire was designed for the door to door survey in the designated streets. The survey questionnaire was constructed to capture quantitative data including responses to the Columbia St gate opening; options for if and when that should happen; and opinions on the potential opening of automated gates with CCTV at Flax St.

No leaflets were given out on the potential “aftercare” scheme during the information gathering as it had been agreed that this might be misconstrued by some individuals as intentionally unduly influencing the answers.

A pre survey notice was also created and distributed to inform householders that the survey would be taking place. The survey information was gathered and is analysed on a street to street as well as an overall survey basis as well as the length of time the respondents had lived in the street. The purpose was to assist the process and final conclusions to enable comparative analysis. To ensure consistency and integrity of the process the CMWorks Senior Consultant carried out all the door to door surveys and drop ins.

All respondents were asked if they wished to provide qualitative comments on the answers they had provided. This was recorded verbatim both on the door to door survey and the drop- ins’. The written comments were clarified and agreed with respondents as to their accuracy at the time they were taken. To encourage participation every respondent was assured that their comments would be reported back as part of the information gathered. The respondents were also assured that their comments would be treated confidentially and not attributed to any individual.

The door to door survey was repeated on different days and different times to increase opportunities for participation. Monday to Friday 2pm-5pm [twice]; 4pm-8pm-[twice];11am-1pm [once]; Saturday early afternoon [1pm- 3.30pm]. Any house not answering or providing information were given contact details on a leaflet to enable them to complete the survey by telephone or online. None took up this offer.

Two drop in sessions were held in the Woodvale Community Centre between 2pm-4pm and 5pm-7pm [Although the latter wasn't completed until 7.45]. A number of residents from the Woodvale area [9 individuals] living near the primary survey streets took part in the drop in.12 people in total came to the drop in to express their views. 3 were people who had already completed the questionnaire but who wanted to further comment on the survey and Flax St opinions.

This report provides information on the results and analysis of the door to door survey and the drop in sessions. It attempts to use the qualitative information to illustrate issues affecting individual and combined responses. In addition, the verbatim comments are included, to assist in assessing the strength or not of the attitudes that are reflected in the responses.

Section 2 Results

2.1 Results Data

Following the completion of the survey and the drop-in sessions the data was collated for the designated streets as a whole and then on an individual street by street basis.

Table 1: Overall Survey Data and Response Rates

	Cambrai Street	Columbia Street	Disraeli Court	Leopold Street	Rosebank Street	Overall Area
Total number of houses in Street	17	49	5	7	52	130
% Completed Questionnaire	41%	53%	60%	71%	42%	48%
% Declined Questionnaire	6%	6%	20%	0%	2%	5%
% Not attained	53%	41%	20%	29%	56%	47%

Columbia and Rosebank are closest physically to the gate, so particular effort was made to return to these streets on every visit to the area. The relatively small number of the houses on Disraeli Court and Leopold Street made completion rates significantly higher.

In observational terms there was a difference between houses where there was never any response at any of the times approached [minimum 3 times at least] and houses where someone appeared to be in the house but declined to answer the door.

It is worth noting that the percentage return of completed questionnaires varies from 41%- 71% on a street by street basis. The average for the overall area was 48%.

Those who attended the drop in, who were not specifically from the designated streets, expressed the view that more streets should have been surveyed. Conversely some of those in Rosebank and Columbia Streets thought only the two streets should have participated.

Table 2: Length of time living at property as a % of total number of houses completing survey

	Cambrai Street	Columbia Street	Disraeli Court	Leopold Street	Rosebank Street	Overall Area
0 - 2 Years	0%	23%	0%	0%	18%	16%
2 - 12 Years	14%	58%	33.33%	40%	32%	41%
12 - 20 Years	29%	8%	0%	20%	9%	11%
20+ Years	57%	8%	33.33%	40%	32%	26%
Unknown	0%	3%	33.33%	0%	9%	6%

In Rosebank Street 50% of those who completed the survey have lived there less than twelve years and in Columbia Street this is even higher at 81%. The accumulative total of those who have lived in the area less than 12 years is 57%.

32% in Rosebank Street but only 8% in Columbia Street have lived 20 yrs.+ in each street. However, in Cambria St this rose steeply to 57%.

The length of time living in the property and/or the community appeared to be a significant factor in the strength of respondents' answers as 'yes' or 'no' to the Columbia St gate and opinion giving on the Flax Street gate. An exception occurred in the drop in where two women with significant residency periods in the area said that they would support both gates being opened.

Observations and comments gathered suggested that among those who responded that the profile of the area is changing with "newcomers", some individuals living in rented accommodation, a high number of residents working out of the area and a younger population who have moved into the area.

Memories of what happened in the past were recounted by some to explain their 'No' answers to change. Conversely the response of those who were "new" to the street, as homeowners, renters, working out of the area in 'Yes' answers were distinctly different – e.g. Cambrai St. has the highest level of longer-term residents and the highest 'No' response.

Table 3: Views on Columbia St Gate Opening as a % of total number of houses completing survey

	Cambrai Street		Columbia Street	Disraeli Court	Leopold Street	Rosebank Street	Overall Area
Yes	29%		50%	100%	60%	55%	52%
No	57%		35%	0%	20%	32%	33%
Not Sure	14%		15%	0%	20%	13%	15%

Table 4: Views on Columbia St Gate Opening as a % of total number of houses in street

	Cambrai Street	Columbia Street	Disraeli Court	Leopold Street	Rosebank Street	Overall Area
Yes	12%	27%	60%	43%	23%	25%
No	24%	18%	0%	14%	13%	16%
Not Sure	6%	8%	0%	14%	6%	7%

The data presented in Tables Three and Four in relation to the views on opening the Columbia St gate is presented both in terms of the percentage of houses that completed the survey in each street and in relation to how many houses are actually in that street.

Comparatively this means that;

- In Columbia St 50% said yes to the gate opening. This is 27% of the total number of houses. 35% said No. 18% of the total number of houses
- In Rosebank St 55% said yes to the gate opening. This is 23% of the total number of houses. 32% said No. 13% of the total number of houses.

Of those who said 'No' 67% indicated that they would not be happy with a six-month pilot and review. 33% of those who said 'No' indicated they were not sure about the idea of the six-month review.

If decision making on the gate opening is to be weighted on a simple consensus of 'yes' and 'no', the data above given in percentage terms signifies 'YES'.

Table 5: Date gates open for those who consent to opening

April	May	June	July	August	September	Other	Don't Know
55%	12%	9%	3%	-	6%	3%	12%

As indicated previously, for those who say 'yes' to the gates opening there is no or little resistance to agreeing a timetable for when that should happen. In qualitative comments many said ASAP, while some others were more hesitant about it not starting in the summer months.

Table 6: Timing schedule for those who consent to opening

Season	Proposed Time	Yes	Other
Summer	7 am - 9 pm	90%	Slightly earlier close
Winter	7am - 6.30pm	96%	Close by dark

Later detailed comments indicated that some ‘yes’ respondents had modified their answers to be a non-specific time or more general “daylight hours”. ‘Yes’ respondents had no concerns about the arrangements of a contractor being paid to open and close the gate.

However, the responses given by those who did say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ need to be understood not only in terms of the reasons given but the strength [or not] of the rationale for why a particular decision was made. In order to assist the analysis for this report key issues have been identified in the sub section that follows.

2.2 Driving and Restraining Factors

In addition to the identification of the factors, a sample of qualitative comment is included to illustrate the thinking and feelings of residents about the issues. The full range of comments are attached separately.

2.2.1 Accessibility to Crumlin Road

For many of those who said ‘yes’, accessibility in terms of walking to work, getting to the shop and garage and access to the bus stop was mentioned:

“I would rather have here open, our gate, (Columbia St.) as it would be so much easier for walking to my work.”

“Yes, ASAP. Would mean no looping around Cambrai for work. “

“My partner uses the bus to come here”

“I thought it was open or would be after last time. It’s easy access other than the long way round”.

One of the drop-in resident's who'd lived with their family had lived a lifetime in the area commented;

"If Flax Street is opened it will cut off the traffic. They'll come down Flax St – down Cambrai onto Lanark Way to get to the Springfield Road for work. I think it would work for people going bumper to bumper traffic at the roundabout –it's crazy –if roundabout at Ardoyne was flat the traffic would flow easier. If it was opened it would be the same as Lanark Way, people need to get in and out and get themselves to work. Personally I don't mind if it cuts down congestion. Traffic on the Crumlin and Woodvale Road is a disgrace."

Counterarguments on exactly the same issues were presented by those who said 'No';

"There are no shops there [Crumlin Road]. There's nothing, so there's no need."

"There's no bus stop and no shop. I wouldn't want to go across there."

"There's nothing out there to go out for anywhere. There's enough trouble when it's not open. Just don't want it open. It would be different if there were shops."

"What's the point of opening the gates just to make a 5-minute shortcut. If there were shops on Hillview, then maybe it would build a bit of trust up for another few years down the line."

2.2.2 Safety and Security [Previous and Current]

The changing nature of relations among and between people at interface and community level was commented upon positively and adversely by some respondents. For 'yes' respondents, their focus was on affirmative views of why they had chosen to agree to open the Columbia St gate.

"Say 'yes' because we have to live in peace and harmony. The only time you get trouble is golf balls over the wall at Fleadh."

"In my opinion they should all be taken down. They cause conflict when they're there."

While many of those who responded 'No' in the survey spoke more in terms of safety and security [see below] there were some who referred to the previous and current political environment.

"If they're going to open the gates it'll be more trouble than anything".

There is no doubt that for the 'No' respondents that safety and security is a strong driver for their choice. For some it is historical, for others more current.

One woman recalled an incident where there was shooting over the wall 35 years ago *"I was young but still remember it I don't see what it's going to add to anyone's life or my life. The only thing it adds to my life is fear."*

Others referred to recent incidents including stolen vehicles; 3 people mentioned a recent incident in Cambrai St and stones thrown at the Boys Model Bus at Christmas was also raised.

2.2.3 The gate as a 'hotspot'

For some respondents, the Columbia St gate is seen as a "hotspot" particularly during the summer and festival periods where violence at different levels escalates.

"Always trouble comes here and you don't have to live at the top of the street. Don't want it to open. What happens when Parade season happens, and we come under attack?"

This fear and anxiety is further compounded for them by the potential Flax St changes *My biggest problem if Flax Street opens – it's bad enough at night. The Ardoyne and New Lodge ones are never out of here [i.e. Woodvale] at night. Suppose they're having the same trouble on their side.*

The concern for older people who live in Rosebank St and Columbia St and for young children wandering on to the Crumlin Road was frequently cited by 'No' respondents.

"No to own gate (Columbia St), pensioners will be tortured. Last time it took the police about an hour to get there. There are a lot of elderly people living there. I wouldn't like a lot of the same troubles that we had before."

"With kids they may wander about, they would go out just for curiosity."

"No, because of more kids getting on to the main road."

2.2.4 ASB and Young People "from both sides"

There was a significant emphasis in the door to door survey question responses and in the drop ins on the risk from young people either carrying out ASB on their own community or groups of young people fighting with each other across the road.

“No matter where you are in this district there’s ASB everywhere” [drop in]. “I’m not sure about our gate. Even if it was locked and unlocked.” “They were torturing young kids a couple of weeks ago” [this was reported in 3 separate conversations] “Last week there was 230 kids drinking on the street between Dover Street, Agnes Street, Hammer. This would make that kind somewhere else to go. This isn’t a one side problem.”

2.2.5. Concerns for people, possessions and homes

Fear of violence and threat, whether real or perceived, was expressed by residents on a number of safety and security issues. No-one asked if there were any intended plans to address the physical safety aspects of the house.

“It’s all about security of home. It’s not beneficial to this street and just out of character. We own our own house – will we be looked after? I just know I don’t want the gates open. Nobody hurt and nothing unforeseen.”

What was asked about, by a small number of residents at the drop in was the potential for support for external cameras for the houses in Rosebank and Columbia Streets that are adjacent to the gate. Feedback was also given on other issues relating to waste, including human and dog excrement and litter since the changes to the area at the top of Rosebank and Columbia St. Observationally, while carrying out the survey there did appear to be a lot of litter and waste as well as some graffiti on a fence. Informing the Belfast City Council Cleansing Department as to their views and current response would be useful either from residents or community organisation representatives.

The perceived lack of a police presence in Tennent Street at the weekends is a significant concern.

“If Flax St opens and Tennent St Police Station is not open at weekends, it’s ridiculous can’t get a policeman here at the weekend. If there is trouble to get police from the Antrim Road how long would that take?”

Confirmation is required from the PSNI to DoJ as to the current and future operational arrangements at Tennant Street to assist in addressing concerns.

Even some of the respondents who said ‘yes’ in the survey indicated their concerns about mitigating some of the potential risks at the Columbia St gate.

“Yes, as long as it’s closed at night. The more open the better.”

“Yes, I think September to open them and make the summer closure 7 instead of 9.”

2.2.5 Communication

Some residents in the area raised communication concerns about the gates from the previous work and currently. The drop-in interviewees were particularly strong in their comments:

“A lot was said the last time [referring to previous consultation on gate design] that definitely gates being opened wouldn’t happen.”

The perception of lack of information and/or speculation about any current changes either for their “own” gate (Columbia St.) or Flax St and their non-involvement to date was a concern for some respondents, particularly those attending drop-in sessions:

“I’ve been told it’s going to happen.”

“Put leaflet together so we know what’s going on”.

Investment from the public purse in structures in an area where there is a perceived lack of infrastructure and capacity building support for residents was strongly expressed in the drop-in sessions.

“Stupid spending all that money. The money could be used for something better that’s needed in the community. Don’t know even what that would be because there’s so much that’s needed.”

Residents at the drop-in spoke of the work that they could see going on in the Flax St Mill (Brookfield) and speculated as to what it meant:

“Flax Mill there’s people working there. Does that mean there’s going to be a complex there with bars?”

“What is the work going on? Is it to be an easier route to get in – is that why it’s up? It’s not for our benefit in Rosebank and Columbia Streets.

“We have no community voice. Someone needs to be answerable for what they’re doing.”

“We’re left here with no advice. We’re like the adopted child.”

“They’re just not working on an empty building”.

While it is not the primary focus of this report nor DOJ responsibility it would be useful if those involved with the Flax St Mill development could provide information for Woodvale Residents living in close proximity to the development site.

2.2.6 Flax St and Columbia St Gates Combination

It was clear from the survey and drop-in comments that many, if not most, of the residents had no prior knowledge of the potential changes to the Flax St structures, other than with the arrival of the pre-survey leaflet. For many respondents, this information caused a significant fearful and resistant reaction not only to the Flax St discussion but appeared to impact negatively upon thinking regarding the Columbia St gate.

“Big concern if we aren’t informed and contributing to Flax St. Whether people like it or not it’s an interface. Things have already been done to get the gate open. Need to be made aware of what’s happening, what’s going on.”

The Flax St potential changes are undoubtedly a significant source of concern that emerged strongly in the door-to-door surveys and the drop-in. While there was no quantitative survey on Flax St, people were invited to express their opinions which they did. Several key points have been extracted from the discussion.

2.3 Flax St Factors

2.3.1. More Than a Hotspot

The history of the Flax St- Cambrai St; Woodvale–Ardoyne interface was referred to by many respondents.

“Don’t open it because it means there will be Troubles again. Troubles again like in ’69 cause that’s where it started [Flax Street and Disraeli Street].”

“There’s no chance of a ‘yes’ to Flax Street. There were definitely notes in the original agreement [referring to previous consultation on design] that there would be no change in Flax Street.”

“There would be war on that Crumlin Road every weekend.”

This was linked to a perceived fear that similar things would happen again.

“Will they be able to drive through the gates? It was awful in the past. My only thing is if the kids were to start messing about so I don’t know. My children’s windows are sky lights and Flax Street is directly across from us. There’s still paint bomb signs just over our wall. Our kids can’t play at the back because of the tins and bottles that are thrown over the wall. By the time you get over there they are already in Brompton Park.”

These comments were made by a family where they had agreed to the opening of the Columbia St gate.

2.3.2 CCTV and Automated Gates

There is no doubt that the controlled CCTV is of crucial importance to the residents who participated in Woodvale. While some were dismissive of how effective it would be

“No, but CCTV would be good on it.”

“As long as it’s CCTV and controlled.”

“Would be good [Referring to automated gates and CCTV coverage] for a sense of security and for cars to get through.”

“Happy enough if they are automated.”/Don’t see how it [CCTV] could do any harm. Maybe it would help identify people coming and going and doing burglaries.”

“Better to have CCTV.” Flax St

“CCTV would need to be put in there just to keep an eye on both sides. Really good to have it there. One side is as bad as the other. You only need one kid to set everything off.”

“What good is CCTV? Rubbish, had it in Clifton Street and it didn’t seem to be working when bands were being attacked or the people.”

CCTV – “Definitely doesn’t stop attacks. It doesn’t work anywhere. They [youths] just pull up their hoods.”

“CCTV wouldn’t really stop ‘them’ if they wanted to come.”

Need cameras up.” “CCTV is good but doesn’t stop anyone coming across the areas.”

While reference is made to the automated gates many respondents if not all, just didn’t know what that meant in reality.

This section of the report has sought to identify the specific factors that drive or hinder changes in structures in the Woodvale – Ardoyne areas.

A brief summary of analysis of those factors and their potential implications are outlined in the section that follows.

Section 3 Summary

In summary the report findings are;

1. The length of time living in the property and/or the community, particularly when associated with their experiences from the conflict or conversely with little or no similar experiences was a factor for those who said yes or no to the potential changes in the opening at the Columbia St gate.
2. There is a changing “profile” of residents who responded to the survey included recently purchased properties from individuals not previously resident in the Woodvale area, some individuals living in rented accommodation, a high number of residents working out of the area and a younger population who have moved into the area.
3. Yes /No responses to opening the gate and other questions were diverse.
 - In Columbia St 50% said yes to the gate opening. This is 27% of the total number of houses. 35% said No. 18% of the total number of houses.
 - In Rosebank St 55% said yes to the gate opening. This is 23% of the total number of houses. 32% said No. 13% of the total number of houses. Of those who said ‘No’ 67% indicated that they would not be happy with a six-month pilot and review. 33% of those who said ‘No’ indicated they were not sure about the idea of the six-month review.

	Cambrai Street	Columbia Street	Disraeli Court	Leopold Street	Rosebank Street	Overall Area
Yes	29%	50%	100%	60%	55%	52%
No	57%	35%	0%	20%	32%	33%
Not Sure	14%	15%	0%	20%	13%	15%

If decision making on the gate opening is to be weighted on a simple consensus of ‘yes’ and ‘no’, the data above given in percentage terms signifies ‘YES’.

4. For those who say ‘yes’ to the gates opening there is no or little resistance to agreeing a timetable for when that should happen. In qualitative comments many said ASAP, while some others were more hesitant about it not starting in the summer months. “Daylight hours” was the phrase most used to describe

preferred opening hours Yes' respondents had no concerns about the arrangements of a contractor being paid to open and close the gate.

5. While there may be a willingness to have the gates open at certain times over a period of time there is a strong driver to have change that will improve lives
6. Thinking, feelings and subsequent opinions that influence yes, no or not sure responses, including drop-in groups, focused on a number of factors.

Accessibility to Crumlin Road as a motivator or limitation

Safe and Security. Previous and current experiences and views expressed from time to live in peace and harmony to current fear and concerns.

The Columbia St gate as a "hotspot" whether because of interface violence or anti-social behaviour. Concern that it may also increase potential for attacks against property or criminal damage.

Concerns for vulnerable and at-risk older people for open gate if "hotspot" and children and young people at risk from increased access to main road. Evidence and concern in relation to littering, waste and graffiti around the Columbia St gate area.

Perceived changes in policing arrangements in Tennant St Station

Diverse levels of support for positive change based on consultation and inclusion in process. Perception by some of lack of communication from those involved in the Flax Mill development

Wider socio-economic environment and need for investment in area

7. While the purpose of the survey was not related to the potential changes in the Flax St gate, respondents were invited, if they wished, to offer opinions.
8. The history of the Flax St-Cambrai St; Woodvale-Ardoyne interface was referred to by some respondents, particularly those most concerned about safety, security and the potential dual "hotspots".

Where "automated gates" were asked about many respondents if not all, just didn't know what that meant in reality.

There is no doubt that controlled CCTV at the Flax St gate is of crucial importance to the Woodvale residents who participated in the consultation.

The results of the consultation with the Advisory Group have been shared and resulted in the following recommended actions.

Section 4 Recommended Actions

DOJ and Advisory Group members share information on the survey results and actions including;

- Presentation to elected representatives and Justice Minister

- Leaflet for tenants with summary and action

- TASCIT and their members

- DOJ Interface Team

- PSNI District Commanders

- Site developer Flax Street/Brookfield Mill

- DOJ follow up information sharing actions with other stakeholders including Flax St/Brookfield Mill Developer, H.E. and BCC.

Supplementary information identified within consultation process is used to share economic, social and environmental concerns for lobbying and potential action with key stakeholders including;

- Woodvale Community Representatives/Group currently supporting COVID-19 response

- LSCDA and other social partners responding to regeneration and revitalization in the area and on a cross community basis

- Interagency representatives who can assist with potential actions and support including PCSP, PHA and Belfast Health Trust

- Government Departments including Departments of Community, Health, Education, Economy and Infrastructure

Synchronicity of gate's change arrangements are managed within context of current circumstances including Covid-19 impact, Flax St/Brookfield Mill developments and response to economic, social and environmental concerns.