



MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP
FOR ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT
ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Belfast City Council Consultation

Belfast PEACE IV Plan

MAG Response

29 | 4 | 16

Belfast City Council Consultation: Belfast PEACE IV Plan

Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) Response

29 | 4 | 16

By email to:

peace@belfastcity.gov.uk

1.00 General

- 1.01 MAG was established in 2007 to advise the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure on the implementation of the Architecture and Built Environment Policy.
- 1.02 MAG welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Belfast Peace IV Plan, and would advise as follows.

2.00 MAG Response

- 2.01 MAG, The Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland, consists of a Chair and 8 Members all of whom are independent professionals appointed through the public appointments process to advise the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure on the implementation of the Policy for Architecture and the Built Environment.
- 2.02 The original consultation document and this response have been circulated to all members of MAG who have commented as they consider necessary. This response is submitted by the Chair and secretariat on behalf of MAG.
- 2.03 MAG's response is given below, as per the format of the online survey, for ease of reference.

Name: Arthur Acheson

Job title or role: Chair, Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture & Built Environment for Northern Ireland

Telephone: 079 8027 6707

Email: arthuracheson@hotmail.com

Address: c/o MAG Secretariat
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Causeway Exchange
1 - 7 Bedford Street,
Belfast BT2 7EG

Are you responding as an individual? No

Name of organisation: Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland

General questions

1. Overarching objectives of the Plan

- **Increased engagement of marginalised communities to participate in peace building and conflict transformation activities for the long term benefit of the city.**
- **Enhanced understanding and appreciation of other cultures and heritage leading to an increased tolerance of difference and respect for cultural diversity.**
- **Working effectively with local communities to create and safeguard space, increasing usage and access to facilities and spaces across the city.**

Do you agree with the overarching objectives of the draft Plan? No, MAG believes that the phrasing of the overarching objectives could be more empathetic to communities, not categorising them but appreciating them as individuals and groups, with local or other interests, as noted below.

If no, what should the overarching objectives be?

The overarching objectives should be:

- To appreciate the talents that people have in the local communities and the many passionate communities of interest across the city and to provide support to help them to build peace in Belfast and the surrounding areas;
- To appreciate the skills of elected representatives and officials that can be assisted to develop cultural competencies which acknowledge and support the diversity and talents of the local communities and passionate communities of interest whom they serve;
- To identify, support and develop the vast range of creative talents that already exists in Council (in and beyond people's job descriptions) to provide practical support to local communities and passionate communities of interest in their endeavours to use all places creatively to pursue their passions, improving public understanding of their skills, interests and talents, leading to social, environmental and economic benefit in the wider public interest.

What actions would you suggest to achieve these objectives?

1. Appreciating that elected representatives and staff in council are well-rounded people with common sense, talents and interests far beyond their specific departmental or committee roles in the Council. Communities can train council representatives to establish genuine and lasting holistic connections with people and places locally, rather than programmes that come and go. Belfast City Council has over 40 staff per Ward. That is 40 staff per elected member. Appreciating what these people can achieve together in a Ward is action No.1.
2. In addition to his or her main role within the Council, every staff member of all job descriptions should become a member of a Ward Work Group along with one or more councillors elected by people in that Ward. The Ward Work Group would be open to every person who lives or works in the Ward, with connections by e-mail and a regular meeting point in the Ward – that could be a community building, a private office or house, a police station, a church, etc. and it could work in different places at different times. It would have a regular presence there and would come together on at least a monthly basis with all interested individuals, including those that offer ideas and services as well as those who receive them. These would include existing members of inter-agency groups as well as community planning representatives of statutory bodies. The council's input into a Ward Work Group would be led by a council staff member who works directly in the Ward and already knows it intimately. This could be a person who works in play, community, technical services, good relations or other area of work but who regularly spends time in the location and knows the streets, parks and alleyways and many of the people who live and work in the Ward.

The Ward Work Group would do actual work; it would not just have meetings. For example, the model of the Audubon Society in USA could be considered. It provides opportunities every Saturday morning for people to clean and improve natural and built environments, with breakfast and coffee (or coffee and lunch) for participants who are willing to give around ninety minutes of productive work to their place each week. In Belfast we have "Friends" groups of parks and our Zoo and there is an existing Council protocol for developing and being Friends of places. We have seen the rise and rise of Park Run. A similar model would give us "Park Fix" or "Place Fix". Not everyone is a runner. Some people may prefer purposefulness and visible results for their

commitment and would happily donate ninety minutes every Saturday to productive and organised work in their locality.

3. Each Ward Work Group would have a holistic approach to the place, knowing about facilities and systems that are working for the Ward and about ideas that may come forward for improving the place. Often these ideas are about doing more with what we've got. By cleaning the place we generate ideas about its better management. By learning how to manage the place (on the ground) we generate ideas for improvements and good briefs for designers.

Please identify how you or your organisation might contribute to the achievement of the desired objectives?

MAG, the Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment, has produced "Action Learning" events across 22 of Northern Ireland's 26 District Councils (up to March 2015) and continues to work with the new Councils.

MAG's work includes techniques of Appreciative Inquiry and Civic Stewardship (active caring for people and places) which led to the publication of its interim report, supported by Belfast City Council at a Symposium in Belfast City Council's Ligoniel Community Centre in November 2013. The Civic Stewardship techniques of action learning, connecting and aligning are described by Dr Bill Snyder, at Civic Stewardship initiatives, in Boston, USA.

MAG is willing to assist Belfast City Council in "doing more with what we've got....."

Recent MAG work with Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has enabled officers to become more closely involved with local communities, who themselves have produced and disseminated Ward Visions. With nominal support from MAG, each Ward Vision was prepared in six weeks for a local place. These short Vision documents may assist Councils in preparing for the detailed implementation of community plans and Local Development Plans as well as providing opportunities for funding applications based on local work. They provide measurable evidence to local people that they themselves have the skills and talents to change places positively and quickly.

MAG's experience with Councils beyond Belfast allows for cross-fertilisation of common ideas and techniques that are working elsewhere and have been positively reported upon in government publications and the press.

2. Children and young people

Outline programme areas

- **Early years interventions such as targeted play services to shape place and create shared space.**
- **Cross-community sporting programmes for young people.**
- **Developing youth ambassadors for the city.**
- **Inclusive local community youth initiatives involving sport, arts, culture, language, the environment and creative use of new technologies that promote positive relations through addressing issues of trust, prejudice and intolerance.**
- **Creation of opportunities for young people from different traditions, cultural background or political opinion to meet and develop positive relationships.**

Do you agree with the outline programme areas under the children and young people theme? No, not entirely, MAG would suggest some modifications, as below.

If no, what should be included?

Children and adults play naturally but are often restricted by circumstances. Local Ward Work Groups could have the competence to, for example, close a street during certain times of the day or restrict speed to walking speed (bringing back for example the person with red flag walking in front of the car which we had at the end of the nineteenth century) during the times of day or in the summer holiday when the street is a natural play street. Doing that job, whether paid or voluntary, would be a pleasure if it helped children to play there.

“Cross–community” should be changed to “inclusive”. Ward Work Groups would naturally include detailed knowledge of children and young people who could be included if small changes were made to provide opportunities for them to join in. Work would therefore be encouraged with neighbouring Ward Work Groups, so that children and young people are benignly introduced to good facilities, sporting and otherwise, with which they are presently unfamiliar.

Youth ambassadors would need to have a job – so the proposal could say what they would do. Young people can be ambassadors not only for their city but also for their Ward. They would naturally be part of Ward Work Groups in any case and would bring specialist knowledge to present their own place to visitors. Many of Belfast's Wards have unique

characteristics and there is widespread interest in authentic stories and presentation, giving people and places confidence that their history, culture and backgrounds are vital to the success of the wider city. Generally MAG finds in its work in other parts of Northern Ireland that young people expect to be paid for their work. Paid youth ambassadors with specific remit to assist the Ward Work Group in their area would be a worthwhile inclusion. There would naturally be a training programme which would best be provided by local schools, perhaps during the summer holiday, or in after-schools clubs.

Local community youth initiatives should be just that – local. The Ward Work Groups would be well placed, including input from young people, to realise what is most likely to provide good experiences. Reports from the TBUC Summer Camps of 2015, for example, could inform proposals for these local opportunities and they should be run by young people with support as requested from adults.

Opportunities to meet could include actual work on difficult issues, making them meaningful and long term. Children and young people make their own opportunities and adult intervention is most effective when it appreciates the younger generation and is itself appreciated (and wanted).

Children and young people can be perceived as noisy and nuisancesome if people are looking for a bit of peace and quiet on a summer evening. However, in the immediate vicinity of the “noise and nuisance” there are often places that are shut up (statutory bodies may believe for very good reason) such as school playing fields, playgrounds, community buildings and even parks (after dark).

Council owns and manages many facilities with high protective fences around them that discourage use and interaction when children and young people need them most. These fences could be dismantled in pilot studies with the help of Ward Work Groups, including local young people. By treating the young people as keyholders of these properties, Council would show the trust and respect that it has for these young people and can therefore expect in return. Beginning to take away these “defences” would set a great example for the removal of other barriers, with children and young people treated as part of trusted society and behaving accordingly.

Are there any additional actions that you would like to see under the theme of children and young people?

Development of the existing service provided by Council that offers children encouragement to play in council playgrounds (but only for example one afternoon per week), developing confidence in Council institutional arrangements to offer the keys of Council facilities to trusted groups of young people and their supporting organisations to have 24 hour access to playgrounds, parks and community buildings, including the co-design of suitable agreed protocols that protect the health, safety and security of all. Children and young people could be encourage to do things (like playing football) in suitable places like a pitch or community building if their organisation were to be trusted with a key. An example in Glenariff of providing lighting at a ball court and making it accessible (with the lights) at any time has greatly reduced vandalism at the Council's public toilets.

Please identify how you or your organisation might contribute to the achievement of the desired results under this theme?

MAG has assisted with experimental pilot studies that gave people "permission" to use facilities in new and different ways. MAG has continually advocated the transfer of management and / or ownership of facilities to local organisations that have the passion and competence to do these things properly and at the times that suit locally rather than at times that suit the working schedules and employment contracts of employees, which do not always match local needs and offers, making them currently unaffordable when needed most.

MAG has worked with Councils to devise new ways to use places, has noted successes and failures in the civic stewardship of places (or its absence) and is prepared to programme work to facilitate Council in designing new ways to use places that in return give responsibility to those willing and able to take it on as well as promoting the new wave of collaborative working that already exists in some currently owned Council premises and could dramatically improve others.

3. Shared spaces and services

Outline programme areas

- **Promotion of positive attitudes towards shared public space, addressing post conflict issues, improving connectivity in the city and building on the city's wider economic potential.**

Do you agree with the outline programme areas under the shared spaces and services theme? No, MAG recommends that the programme areas are more specific, as noted below

If no, what should be included?

Civic Stewardship (active caring for people and places) does not depend on job descriptions or the time of day or night. It carries out and learns directly from low risk, low cost, fast experiments that show how places work (and can work in future) at different times of day, night, season, etc. A good example of civic stewardship is the grounds of Belfast City Hall, where perhaps people care most in Belfast. Another is the Templemore Avenue Baths involving the passionate community of interest in swimming. Shaftesbury Leisure Centre and the Grosvenor Road complex are further examples of direct involvement of place management and stewardship by and for the benefit of local communities and passionate communities of interest. Whilst these facilities are not without their critics and not perfect models, they demonstrate that Belfast City Council has the ability to manage change and that is able to develop trust to work creatively and flexibly with non-statutory organisations which themselves demonstrate passions in their interests for people and places as well as economic and social development, while actively caring for their environments and opening them at the times and under conditions (including cost of entry) that change to suit different users.

Are there any additional actions that you would like to see under the theme of shared spaces and services?

The widespread introduction of civic stewardship (active caring for people and places) as a principle in Council owned facilities to encourage much wider use. By demonstrating success in stewardship of the Council's premises, spreading these techniques to the work of other statutory organisations in education, health, social development,

regional development, community services and housing for widespread public benefit. City Council can learn from its own good examples and from the community and voluntary sectors, where civic stewardship thrives, including multiple key holders in churches, for example, with collaborative management and trusted individuals and groups continually advancing their work whilst respecting the necessary caring protocols for people and places, including health, safety, insurances, protection of children and vulnerable adults, etc.

Please identify how you or your organisation might contribute to the achievement of the desired results under this theme?

MAG has a record of creative working in civic stewardship with 22 of the former 26 Councils and Belfast City Council kindly hosted a Symposium on the techniques of civic stewardship at which the Interim Report was launched in November 2013.

<https://www.dcalni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dcal/mag-civic-stewardship-interim-report.pdf>

MAG offers to work with the Council to demonstrate how the formation of Ward Work Groups (using one or two as samples) would work on a daily, weekly and monthly basis as the future shape of Local Area Working. Yes, the longest serving employee would be assigned to a Ward Work Group, as would the latest recruit. Yes, the highest paid official would be so assigned as would the most lowly paid. Yes, the elected representative with the highest number of votes would be included as would one that was elected last with just a handful of first preferences. Ward Work Groups treat everyone as an equal and in similar terms, long term residents, newcomers, children and older people, those with disabilities and others referred to in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act would all be welcomed – not only meeting and talking, but also doing.

Existing facilities would be appreciated more, used more, opened up more. PEACE IV would be demonstrably implemented most efficiently, getting best value from the available funds. Hugely increased job satisfaction, easier reporting to Europe and a creative and dynamic force would have acted on Belfast's 60 Wards and therefore on the city of Belfast as a whole, with all its interests and diversity none of which would be stifled and all would be encouraged by each other.

4. Building positive relations

Outline programme areas

- **Leadership.**
- **Supporting communities.**
- **Collaborative network development.**
- **Centenaries and culture and arts for peacebuilding and reconciliation.**

Do you agree with the outline programme areas under the building positive relations theme? No, not entirely, as MAG believes that Council could be more descriptive in recognising leadership and support mechanisms and networks that already exist and could extend the range of supported interests far beyond centenaries, culture and the arts, as noted below.

If no, what should be included?

Developing the concept of collegiality with organically changing leadership and support in pursuit of shared objectives.

Understanding, appreciating and supporting local communities and passionate communities of interest by working alongside them, with them in their own places, and not from central offices in the Council.

Reading, marking and learning from its own databases, Council could work closely with each Ward Work Group to find the organisations and individuals in each Ward, identify the special talents, connect them with others in the Ward and with interested parties across the city and beyond. Council could use intelligence from other Ward Work Groups as a new and creative way of Local Area Working that helps to align services with local communities and passionate communities of interest.

Centenaries, culture and arts are three passions but there are many more. These include gardening, allotments, food preparation and eating together, clothes, fashion, woodwork, knitting, home decorating, horse racing, fishing, old vehicles, pet shows, hiking and walking, church, swimming, football, pub quizzes, television, just things that people love doing. These are the passionate communities of interest who in addition to local communities (with each one learning from the other) can transform this city, Ward by Ward, to make it a better place for each other and for us all.

Are there any additional actions that you would like to see under the theme of building positive relations?

Positive relations are best nurtured in circumstances where people work together against adversity. Doing the work together – that is in the same place at the same time, in the Ward where things are going well and the Ward where things are not – the best opportunities for change emerge. This is a kind of studio working – where people stick with things, year by year, fixing and improving, coming together on a continuing basis not for a monthly meeting or interagency group but on a day to day basis and when most needed – actually physically being there, trying things out, making small changes, seeing how they work or don't work, investing low cost, short, medium and long term in change then finding that what works can be developed – there and then – or there and later as resources permit – but having in place all the necessary approvals, permissions and capacity so that the only missing link may be funding. And with or without funding, community is ready, doing its small things and not waiting for the big solution that may or may not actually work.

“Over the last 50 years, we have made little or no progress on many civic outcomes: Rates of poverty, drop-outs, disease, homelessness, and crime are about what they were in 1970; and this is particularly salient in distressed urban neighborhoods. An underlying cause is the persistent misalignment between institutional policies and programs on the one hand, and community needs, aspirations, and practices on the other.”

- William M. Snyder, Ph.D. wmsnyder@gmail.com Civic Stewardship Initiative, Cambridge, Massachusetts

William M. Snyder has worked for over 30 years on large-scale change efforts in the private, public, and non-profit sectors. His research and consulting support civic stewardship initiatives that promote wellbeing at community, city, and regional levels. He is now organizing an action-learning lab in Boston to develop civic stewardship capabilities and demonstrate how they can help community residents achieve targeted outcomes. Bill is a global thought-leader on the topic of “communities of practice” – groups that facilitate learning, innovation, and collaborative action among practitioners with a shared passion.

“We have civic stewardship every time a group of citizens (be they residents of the same neighbourhood or not) take a collective initiative to upgrade or give new life to a site, independently of impulses from government entities . Typically, such initiatives have to do with public spaces: a pavement-cleaning campaign, a collective action to protect an endangered ecological or historic site, the reorganization of a derelict public space, the appropriation of an abandoned site for communal purposes, the installation of community gardens.”

- Global Public Space Toolkit: From Global Principles to Local Policies and Practice: All rights reserved © 2015 United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), P.O. Box 30030, 00100 Nairobi, GPO Kenya, www.unhabitat.org - HS Number: HS/034/15E - ISBN Number: 978-92-1-132656-7

Please identify how you or your organisation could contribute to the achievement of the desired results under this theme?

MAG works with people. MAG's agenda is the Policy for Architecture and the Built Environment which stresses the benefits of a good environment for people's lives and seeks better ways to provide better places.

MAG brings no predetermined solutions, programmes or projects, but works with people in their places using techniques of civic stewardship to actively learn by doing small, low risk experiments, to connect the unexpected and the obvious and to align with government initiatives to do more with what we've got.

MAG is a firm local advocate of the internationally recognised techniques of civic stewardship that can demonstrate change within days and weeks, encouraging and inspiring communities, elected representatives and officials.

MAG is willing to bring this expertise to Belfast City Council.

Do you have any further specific questions you would like answered? No
Would you be interested in receiving further updates by email
as the Belfast PEACE IV Plan develops? Yes

Arthur Acheson

MAG Chair

29 | 4 | 16