INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

Duncairn Community Partnership
Peace Walls Attitudinal Survey
Summary of Results
October 2017
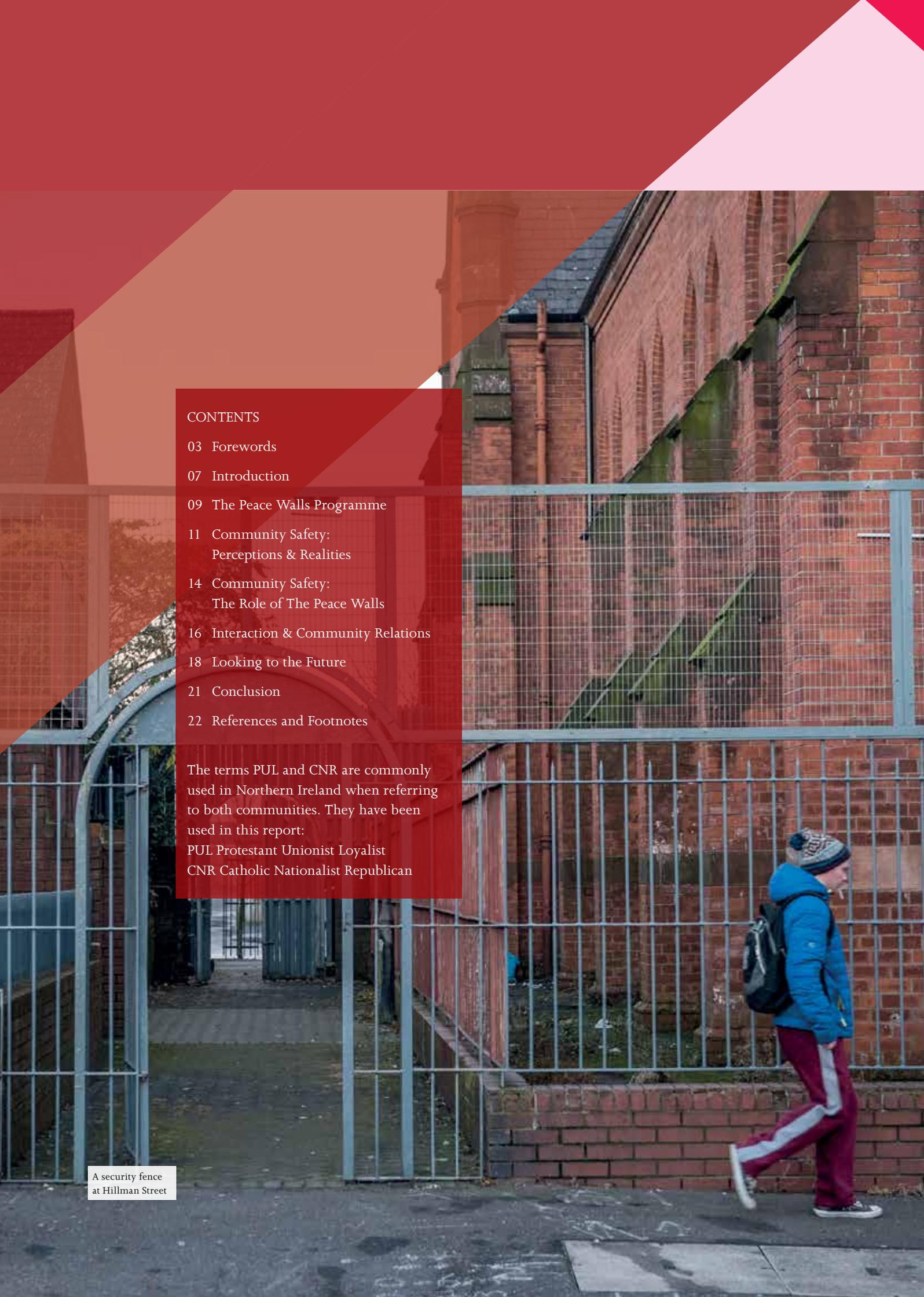
DUNCAIRN
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

CONTENTS

The terms PUL and CNR are commonly
used in Northern Ireland when referring
to both communities. They have been
used in this report:
PUL Protestant Unionist Loyalist
CNR Catholic Nationalist Republican

A security fence
at Hillman Street

Foreword

Today, almost 50 years since the first Peace Wall was built, more than 100 physical structures remain as visible symbols of continued division and segregation. The IFI Peace Walls Programme is currently working with local communities impacted by approximately 66 of these barriers. There should be no place for physical separation barriers in a truly reconciled society but we have not yet reached that stage and, given that the risks associated with barrier removal processes lie almost exclusively with those residents and communities most impacted by their presence, it is right that we prioritise their views and concerns while supporting them to bring about positive change if and when they decide the time is right.

The vast majority of physical barriers are located within communities that have suffered disproportionately during the conflict. These interface areas continue to endure high levels of multiple deprivation including educational under-achievement, mental and physical health inequalities, inadequate facilities, poor delivery of public services, physical blight and neglect. Investment potential remains limited with significant Agency and political collaborative will and effort required to change this negative dynamic. At this stage in our Peace Process, and four years since the Together Building a United Community (TBUC) pledge on the removal of barriers by 2023, local communities deserve to know what is planned in terms of delivery, how they will be involved in the decision-making and what protections will be offered to them.

This Duncairn Community Partnership (DCP) baseline attitudinal survey report is one of six carried out in local communities impacted by physical barriers as part of the International Fund for Ireland's Peace Walls Programme. Unlike other studies, these surveys concentrate on the views of those most affected by change to the barriers, the people who live closest to them and who would be taking the biggest risks. The surveys show that fear continues to be a key issue for many, yet most want to see physical change in place for future generations. Positive change will only be enabled when agencies work together to ensure local voice is prioritised and after-care protection of life and property is in place and effective.

The findings from DCP include:

- An encouraging 25% of respondents want the barriers removed now with a further 33% wishing to see this happen in the future and an additional 26% willing to see de-classification, re-imaging or providing greater accessibility (gates opened for longer hours). 71% want the barriers removed in the lifetime of their children or grandchildren. Improved safety and security measures are ranked as the main factors that could influence positive attitudinal change to the removal of peace walls. While these statistics provide a strong baseline for the future work of the DCP PWP, the 36% who want some form of

barrier to remain cannot be overlooked with 12% wishing to maintain the status quo. A confidence building community engagement strategy will be needed to address these concerns.

• 57% of respondents record regular interaction with the other community and, while this decreases to 39% in relation to interaction with their neighbours across the peace barriers, this remains a very encouraging percentage which can be built upon in the coming phase of the DCP PWP.

These results are significant and indicate that communities are willing, with support, to work towards positive change. While challenging, it underscores that if progress is to be realised, community goodwill and ambition must be met in full by tangible action from relevant statutory authorities backed by strong political leadership. Ring-fenced resources and funding is part of delivering change as is the need for a detailed and considered strategy that aligns the efforts of those who own the physical structures, including the Department of Justice, local authorities, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and others. Without this, we may ultimately be taking communities to a place where they cannot advance any further, causing frustration and anger and effectively negating progress made.

Adrian Johnston
Chairman, International Fund for Ireland

DCP staff at the now redundant security fence behind Parkside Gardens

DCP Foreword

Firstly, as Chairperson of DCP, I would like to thank all those residents who took part in this survey and also the local residents who conducted it on our behalf. The purpose of this exercise is to give residents living closest to the physical 'Peace' structures in the Duncairn and Limestone areas the opportunity to express their views on what should happen to their physical surroundings as we move forward.

Change to the physical legacy of our conflict can only happen where there is community consensus to do so. The results from this survey help us to highlight where there is an appetite for change and where more confidence building measures are needed. It also allows us to look at relationships either side of these structures and to determine where additional relationship-building work needs to be focussed.

Although almost 40% of respondents have regular interaction with their nearest neighbours on the other side of the barrier, there remains significant work to do to create opportunities for cross-community engagement, particularly for those residents who only occasionally or never engage with their neighbours.

In terms of physical change 58% of respondents want to see peace walls removed either now or at some time in the future. This figure is extremely encouraging. However, a significant minority of 36% want to maintain some form of physical barrier. This indicates that there is still a body of work to be done to generate greater confidence for change across the area.

DCP was established to extend and expand working relationships across two of the most difficult and contentious interfaces in Belfast, creating a formal partnership between organisations in New Lodge/Newington/Parkside, Tiger's Bay/Mountcollyer, third party NGOs and establishing extensive links with statutory organisations.

With the support of the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), DCP agreed to work towards the removal of all obstacles to normal, peaceful relations in this part of North Belfast. Each of our member organisations has its own history of involvement with the Partnership, but at its core DCP is built on three key pillars: community organisations actively committed to the wider peace process and normalisation, local community organisations with strong roots in community development and organisations committed to inclusive peace-building through engagement at local level.

Since our partner organisations began working collectively we have been instrumental in bringing significant transformation to this part of the city. Working with traders, the PSNI and other statutory agencies we helped bring about the rebranding and rejuvenation of the Cityside Complex.

Through our partnerships with local Housing Associations we played a key role in delivering a shared social housing facility on Limestone Road (The Delaware Building) and our engagement processes have created a climate free from any significant sectarian violence for the last number of years.

We have supported a wide variety of inter-community events under the banner of 'Events for All' including projects for senior citizens, women's groups, families and young people. These involve events marking specific celebrations such as Christmas, Easter and St Patrick's Day and the use of a variety of community venues including youth clubs, McCrory Church and sports facilities.

In recent years, local youth clubs have developed inter-community projects and programmes involving police-community liaison and there is active engagement between local schools, which will see the further development of Alexandra Park into a shared space with the installation of an outdoor learning zone and the creation of a 'Park for All'.

The partnership has played a variety of different roles in promoting and supporting the ongoing success of these developments.

These concerns are strengthened by the current political instability within Northern Ireland caused by the absence of a power-sharing administration at Stormont.

Conor Maskey
Chairperson, Duncairn Community Partnership Ltd.

Introduction

Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, considerable progress has been made to address the legacy of division with successive Northern Ireland Life & Times (NILT) surveys signifying public approval of improved community relations and a desire to move towards a fully-realised shared society.[1]

However, Northern Ireland remains a society dominated by the existence of the 'Peace Walls' with such structures providing a constant physical reminder of the divisions that remain.

The Peace Walls Programme (henceforth PWP) is an initiative developed and funded by the International Fund for Ireland (The Fund) since 2011/2012 to assist communities most impacted by the peace walls and physical barriers due to their proximity to these structures.

It aims to empower these residents to reach a position where they feel safe and ready to begin the dialogue necessary for the successful dismantling of interface barriers and have confidence in and a positive attitude to barrier reduction and/or removal.
The PWP operates within a policy context dominated by the 'Together Building a United Community' (TBUC) Strategy' (NIE, 2013). Central to this strategy is a policy commitment to remove all interface barriers by 2023 in consultation with those most affected (i.e. those living closest to the barriers) and the implementation of an 'Interface Barrier Support Package' to enable this to happen.

Gormley-Heenan et al. (2015) have highlighted that the TBUC strategy faces a number of difficulties regarding its capacity to realise this commitment. This is in part due to the continuing inconsistency as regards what constitutes a 'peace wall' with the figures differing between 53 (Department of Justice figures, 2013) and 116 (Belfast Interface Project figures, 2017).

Moreover, there is a lack of clarity in relation to the role communities can actually play in the process, how their viewpoints can be measured over time and how 'confidence' and 'consensus' can be considered to have been met.

Naming a deadline has raised a concern within some communities that implementation of the strategy will occur from the 'top-down' and be acted on without relevant consultation and input from those most affected.

Additionally, as of June 2017, the NI Executive has failed to agree on the value of an 'Interface Barrier Support Package' which underscores scepticism within communities that resources will not be made available for change to occur.

These concerns are strengthened by the current political instability within Northern Ireland with the continuing failure to reinstate the power-sharing administration at Stormont.

Map 1: DCP Engagement Zone
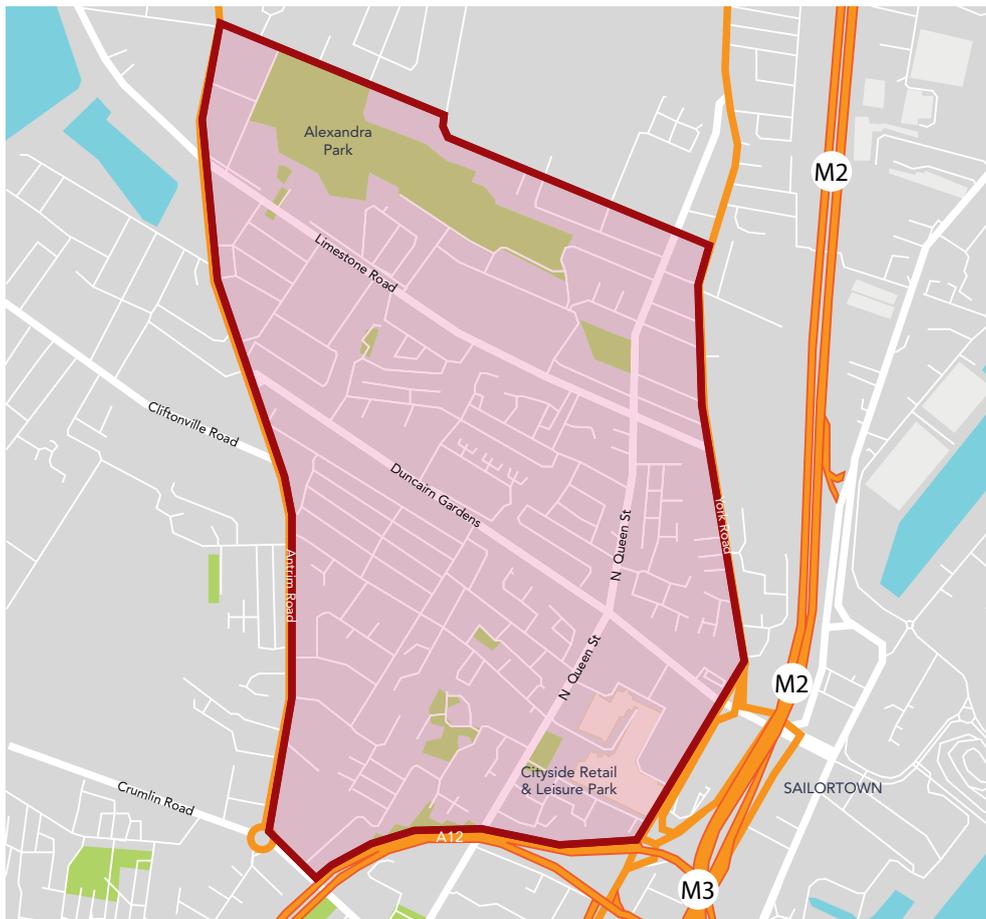
The Peace Walls Programme

Engagement with the PWP occurs through grassroots programmes aimed at developing and delivering a range of confidence and relationship-building interventions within and between interface communities. These are facilitated by community representatives in collaboration with relevant statutory agencies.

The Programme has been in operation in the Lower North Belfast area – an area historically affected by the worst of the Troubles with a disproportionate number of deaths occurring there during the conflict – since 2012 and is facilitated by the Duncairn Community Partnership (henceforth DCP).

To date, DCP has reported significant progress at a number of sites including:

* removal of the Newington Street Barrier in consultation with the local community and the Department of Justice (DoJ);
* opening of all six security gates at Duncairn Gardens from early morning until early evening (Monday to Friday);
* removal of the peace fence between North City Business Centre and Hillman Street;
* replaced grills on most of the windows of houses at Duncairn Gardens with toughened glass;
* reimaging of peace walls at Lepper Street and Syringa Street; and
* extension of opening times of gate in Alexandra Park in line with normal park hours.

The second phase of the Programme focuses on a further ten identified peace wall sites across the engagement area with DCP reporting that the Programme is well-established in the area and residents are more open to addressing the topic of barrier reimaging, reduction and/or removal.

Despite commitments in both the Programme for Government (2011-2015) and within the TBUC strategy document (2013) that change to the barriers will only happen in consultation with communities most affected, there remains limited quantitative data on residents' views to such change.[2]

To address this and in order to aid planning and development of the second phase of the programme and deliver the wider outcome of the PWP, DCP gathered survey data from 137 of the most impacted residents at these 10 identified sites.

This is a continuation of work undertaken by DCP to promote engagement between and within communities and to provide opportunities for residents to voice their concerns about barrier removal, ensure any future alterations are resident-led and move towards overcoming the psychological barriers that hinder change.

The objective of the survey is to baseline attitudinal positions from residents of both

Alexandra Park fence

community backgrounds in order to establish an area-specific profile and provide PWP staff with information to aid the development of future initiatives from an evidence base.

This research briefing paper outlines some of the key findings from the survey in relation to residents' key concerns about the peace walls, their current attitudes towards the role of the peace walls, the current status of community relations in the area and views on the future status of the barriers.

These findings are presented in relation to results from all respondents and from both communities (when relevant) and are discussed in greater detail in the remainder of this briefing paper.

They indicate both the opportunities and challenges that DCP face in meeting the aims and objectives of the PWP within this area.

Community Safety:
Perceptions & Realities

Community Safety and Security Remains a Central Issue in the Area and Greater Fears Exist Within the PUL Community
56% of all respondents have lived in the area for over twenty-five years
84% feel 'very safe' or 'fairly safe' living in the area
58% of all respondents express safety and/or security issues as their key concern
Of this, three concerns relate to actual' violence, namely ASB, trouble/fighting at the interface and attacks on property (32%) and five relate to fears of future violence/and or change to the barriers (27%)
20% of all respondents name anti-social behaviour (ASB) as their key concern at the interfaces [Table 6]. Young people/children are reported as the main perpetrators of this. Yet 19% of all respondents believed that a negative aspect of the barriers is that they contribute to and/or encourage ASB
63% of all respondents felt that the key positive aspects of the peace walls are that they 'make people feel safer' (42%) and act as a preventative measure (21%).
65% stated that retention of the peace walls will have a negative impact on community safety
Improved safety measures and better policing are ranked as the main factors that could influence positive attitudinal change to the removal of the peace walls

The PUL community report greater fears in relation to safety and security issues
A significant percentage of the PUL community have issues with potential violence (36%) compared to their CNR counterparts (21%)
The PUL community has concerns about 'youths loitering/gathering at the interface' (15%), personal safety concerns (9%), concerns with trouble/fighting at the interface (11%) and attacks on property (9%)
In comparison, these were much lower within the CNR community (5%, 2%, 3% and 2% respectively)
CNR respondents reported greater concerns only in relation to ASB (25% to 13%) and fears of future violence at contentious times (9% to 4%)

A key finding within the data is that community safety and security remain a central issue in the area and as such provides an obstacle to the reduction and/or removal of the peace walls and the progress of the PWP. Nevertheless, these anxieties are tempered with an acceptance by residents that the barriers can in part exacerbate violent and anti-social behaviour and are not the only solution to such safety and/or security concerns.

Even though over four in every five respondents (84%) reported that they felt safe living in this area, over half of all respondents (58%) also named safety and/or security issues as their key concerns relating to the barriers. This is further supported by 63% of all respondents naming the perceived safety and security functions of the barriers as being the key positives of the barriers.

This suggests that that these high reported levels of safety may be in part reliant on the

existence of the peace walls. This need to 'feel' safe is understandable given that over half of all respondents have lived in this area for over twenty-five years and in that time witnessed the worst of the Troubles, high levels of sectarian violence, civic unrest and seasonal tensions.

There is also a sense from the data that the peace walls play an important 'psychological' safety role in the minds of respondents rather than an actual protective one from the 'other community'.

Of eight identified safety/security concerns, only three (ASB, attacks on property and trouble/fighting at the interface) can be considered 'actual' safety and security fears. The remaining five concerns can only be linked indirectly to safety concerns as they are concerned with 'fears' of future violence at the interface or the possible impact on community safety should the barriers be removed.[3]

The reported prevalence of ASB exists alongside inferences that violence at the barriers is being perpetrated in the main by young people. This indicates that residents in this area accept that there is a move away from inter-community sectarian violence but suggests that this is being replaced by both inter and intra community low-level violence and ASB.

As DCP has identified, this area continues to have an element of 'paramilitaries' and 'dissidents' and there is potential for increased 'punishment attacks' should this core issue not be addressed.

However, respondents do not seem to believe that the peace walls will contribute to resolving this with only 3% stating that the barriers prevent and/or limit ASB with a much larger 19% stating the opposite. Qualitative data also indicates that a number of residents believe that the barriers contribute to ASB by providing a meeting-point and/or by maintaining long-term divisions.

These findings indicate that there is a need for greater inter-generational contact and increased collaboration with local youth service providers to both address this negative perception of young people and resolve issues. Such activities may be helpful in encouraging younger people to feel they have a stake in their communities and showcase the positive contributions they can make.

The important 'psychological' role that the peace walls play in relation to safety and/or security as opposed to their actual protective role is voiced by a majority of residents. They identify the positive aspects of the peace walls as being that they make people 'feel' safe (42%) with much lower reporting in relation to the barriers helping to 'keep the peace' (12%) and/or prevent attacks on property (2%). This indicates that the barriers are not seen as the only way to prevent trouble, violence and ASB in the area and, in some cases, are seen as a contributory factor to such behaviour.

This is further supported by respondents identifying improved safety measures (such as security cameras) and better policing (such as improved police response rates to incidents) as

the main factors that could influence them to being more open to the removal of the peace walls. Additionally, 65% of residents state that retention of the peace walls would have a negative impact on community safety.

This implies an opportunity for DCP to develop acceptable alternatives to the barriers which the community in this area seem to be open to considering.

When considered from a community identity basis, fears for potential violence are reported much more strongly within the PUL community (36%) in comparison to their CNR counterparts (21%). Conversely CNR respondents have much greater concerns about possible violence at contentious times (9%) than their PUL neighbours (4%) which implies that the CNR community would welcome greater movement towards the resolution of parading issues at a macro-level prior to committing fully to the removal of interface barriers.

There is an important lesson for the PWP in relation to these findings. It suggests that the PWP needs to consider the reasons underpinning the PUL community's prominent safety and security concerns with their particular emphasis on fears of potential violence in comparison to the CNR community and may mean the PWP prioritising different factors within the two communities rather than a 'one size fits all' approach in order to progress the work of the programme.

That such perceptions exist more strongly within the PUL community indicates that future work undertaken will need to particularly address the reasons underpinning these fears and provide greater reassurance and evidence to this community that removal or reduction of the peace walls will not lead to deteriorating community safety.

The challenge for the PWP is two-fold in that 'feelings' of safety are both subjective and open to influence and any willingness to remove the barriers may ebb and flow depending on external factors. However, as the PWP is facilitated at a grassroots level, DCP are in a position to gauge how they can most effectively address these safety fears and security concerns.

The secondary challenge is that the primary identified factor that could contribute to positive attitudinal change (improved safety measures) is likely to only be made available when the TBUC Barrier Interface Support Package is agreed. Given the continuing political uncertainty, this is unlikely to happen soon but the absence of such a package can only serve to erode confidence when negotiating barrier changes.

Community Safety:
The Role of The Peace Walls

Aligned with these findings is the differing role that residents believe the peace walls play in maintaining community safety. Whilst respondents indicate that the peace walls retain a security role, the practical aspect of the barriers in allowing access to other areas and services is the reported main function of the walls (47%).

However, the PUL community also report a much stronger confidence in the ability of the barriers to 'protect' them and assuage safety and security concerns, whilst there exists a level of ambivalence within the CNR community that this is the case. They feel more strongly that the barriers play a psychological role rather than an actual protective one.

Almost one-quarter (23%) of the PUL community believe the primary functions of the barriers are either to prevent attacks on property (8%) to 'keep the peace' (9%) and/or to make people feel safe (6%). As regards the 'positive' aspects of the barriers, 57% of this community agree that they make people feel safe (37%) and help 'keep the peace' (20%).

Whilst the CNR community agree to a similar extent that the function of the barriers is to 'keep the peace' (9%), they do not believe as strongly that they act to make people feel safe (3%) and/or prevent attacks on property (2%).

As regards the 'positive' aspects of the barriers, 44% of the CNR community agree that they make people feel safe but a much smaller 6% believe they help 'keep the peace'.

The PUL Community Report Greater Confidence in the Capacity of the Barriers to Protect Them But There is a Level of Ambivalence Within the CNR Community
47% of all respondents believe that the primary function of the peace walls is to enable access to services/areas at certain times
23% of the PUL community believes that the primary functions of the walls are to prevent attacks on property, to 'keep the peace' and/or to make people feel safe in comparison to 14% of the CNR community
20% of the PUL name a positive of the peace walls is that they 'keep the peace' in comparison to 6% of the CNR community
30% of CNR respondents had 'no concerns' about the peace walls in comparison to 19% of PUL respondents
24% of CNR respondents stated that the barriers had 'no function' in comparison to 9% of PUL respondents
25% of CNR respondents felt the barriers had 'no positives' in comparison to 14% of PUL respondents
22% of CNR respondents stated that the peace walls contributed to ASB which was their key concern
54% of CNR respondents could envisage a time without the presence of the barriers in comparison to 34% of the PUL community

Cross-community events have brought people together

The psychological impact that the barriers have on the PUL community and their much stronger belief that the barriers protect them needs to be addressed in order to reassure this community that the removal of the barriers will not cause a decline in community safety. The PWP and relevant statutory agencies will need to work together to offer alternatives to the barriers that will offer similar levels of safety and security to those who hold these concerns.

The ambivalence of the CNR towards the capacity of the walls to protect offers an opportunity to the PWP in that this community may be further encouraged to move towards the removal of the barriers should alternatives be offered that can more effectively provide such protection.

The linking of the existence of the peace walls to the continuation and/or exacerbation of ASB in the CNR community implies that reduction or removal of the walls could be welcome as part of a solution to this over-riding concern.

Furthermore, the CNR community reports more strongly that they have 'no concerns' about the barriers (30%) in comparison to their PUL counterparts (19%). Although this cannot be assumed to mean the CNR community instinctively favours the removal of the walls, it certainly indicates that the barriers have much less impact on their day-to-day lives and thus they place less importance upon them than their PUL neighbours. This is an interesting finding indicating as it does that there already exists a significant minority in the overall area who may be less difficult to persuade to consider the removal of the peace walls.

This again underscores the necessity for the TBUC Barrier Interface Support Package to be agreed and put in place as soon as possible in order to address the key factor of provision of greater safety measures and build trust that removal of the peace walls will not have a corresponding negative impact on community safety.

Interaction & Community Relations

Interaction with the 'other' community is regular and such interaction is considered positive and quantity and quality of interaction between the two communities did not reveal stark differences
57% of all respondents stated they had contact with the 'other' community on a regular basis but a further 10% stated that this never happened
This declined to 39% of all respondents reporting regular contact with the community on the 'other side of the peace wall' with 23% stating that such contact never happened
31% of respondents met at choice-based meetings such as community events
81% of all respondents reported that interaction was 'always' or mostly positive with a zero response in regard to it being 'always' negative
24% of all respondents view the negatives of the peace walls as preventing greater interaction by 'keeping the two communities apart' (15%) and 'preventing normalisation/creating tensions' (9%).
68% agreed that no change to the barriers would have a negative impact on community relations

54% of the PUL community reported interaction with the other community happened on a regular basis compared to 59% of the CNR community
12% of the PUL community reported interaction 'never' happened with the other community compared to 8% of CNR respondents
42% of the CNR community reported regular interaction with those on the 'other side of the peace walls in comparison to 35% of the PUL community
Both communities reported identical levels of no interaction (23%) in relation to those on the other side of the barriers
80% of PUL respondents stated such interaction was positive whilst 82% of CNR respondents reported the same

Although the peace walls were first constructed to address safety and security concerns, such structures also need to be considered in relation to how they perpetuate segregation and division of communities by reaffirming territorial 'no-go areas' and subsequent beliefs that there is no need for communities to interact with each other or build better community relations.

Despite better community relations overall throughout Northern Ireland, research by Ulster University (2012, 2015) indicates that interaction with the 'other community' remains lower at interface areas.

At present, whilst regular levels of interaction (very often/ fairly often) with the 'other community' overall in this area are promising (57%) they do decline to 39% when considering regular interaction with those on the other side of the peace walls.

Instances of no interaction rise from 10% of the other community overall to 23% in relation to those on the other side of the barriers. Given the violent history of this area, these reports of continuing non-interaction are not surprising.

However, no stark differences exist in this area between regular interaction with the other community overall and those on the other side of the barriers. Additionally, significant numbers of residents view the peace walls as maintaining division (24%) and the retention of such structures will have negative impacts on community relations (68%).

Data from this survey shows that when interaction does occur, it is overwhelmingly positive with a majority (81%) of respondents considering interaction to be 'always' positive or 'mostly' positive and a zero response rate recorded as regards interaction being 'always' negative. Once again these results were mirrored across both communities.

The research overall indicates that interaction levels in this area are regular, that when they occur they are positive and most importantly that residents are (in the main) open to interaction. Additionally, there are no significant differences in either the quantity or quality of interaction when stratified by religion which means that DCP can continue to focus on increasing interaction as a whole rather than concentrating on one community or the other.

These findings indicate opportunities for the PWP in this area. Interaction with those on the other side of the peace walls is decidedly lower than with the 'other' community as a whole but it is not so poor to indicate an unwillingness to interact. In fact, given the violent history of this area, it is surprising that residents report such openness to interaction.

Moreover, levels of interaction in this area compare favourably to those reported by Ulster University (2015). In that survey, 22% of all respondents reported that they interacted 'very often' or 'often', with those on the other 'side' of the peace walls whereas 42% reported that they had 'no contact'. In this area those figures are 57% (very/fairly often) and 23% (never) respectively.

Whilst DCP does need to continue to be mindful of non-interaction levels, they have already evidenced their capacity to cultivate better community relations and build greater trust across this area through the organisation of community events. It is important that residents and their children continue to receive such opportunities to meet each other at such activities.

The second opportunity for the PWP is that there is already awareness in the area that the retention of the peace walls is an obstacle to improved community relations. Encouraging alternatives to the peace walls can be aided by DCP continuing to focus and build upon the already present belief that the barriers' existence contributes to worsening relationships alongside showing how removal of such structures can lead to better community relations.

Looking to the future

The final key finding from the survey is an extremely important one for DCP/PWP in that the majority of residents favour change to the barriers in some form with 84% (4% did not know) of respondents wanting to see change be that reimaging, reclassification or removal.

The data shows that there is a level of desire for removal of the walls in this community at present with one-quarter of all residents in this area favouring the total removal of the walls 'now', and an additional 26% favouring change at some level (declassification, greater accessibility and/or reimaging). Only 12% of respondents wish to retain the status quo.

There is even greater hope for future change with 33% of all respondents reporting that they would favour removal of the walls at an unspecified time and it is clear that residents in this area do not wish to pass this issue to another generation with 71% stating they do not want their children or grandchildren to continue living with the barriers.

This indicates that hope for change exists within the area but does so side-by-side with concerns about what change might lead to. This view is further supported by improved safety measures and better policing being named as the two key factors that could encourage positive attitudinal change towards the barriers' removal.

There also exists a level of ambivalence regarding the impact that the removal of the barriers would have on improved living conditions in the area. This provides DCP with an opportunity to highlight the positives that such change could bring to this area by continuing their regeneration work.

The Majority of Residents Favour Change to the Barriers in Some Form Although the PUL Community are More Cautious About Their Removal
25% of respondents wanted the barriers to be removed 'now', 33% wanted this to happen 'sometime in the future' and 26% were content to see them reclassified, reimaged or providing greater accessibility
Only 12% of all respondents wished to maintain the current status
71% of all respondents were strongly in favour of the barriers being removed within the lifetime of their children or grandchildren
45% of all respondents believed could envisage a time when there are no segregation barriers.
There was a level of ambivalence regarding the impact that the removal of the barriers would have on improved living conditions in the area
Improved safety measures and better policing were named as the two key factors that could encourage positive attitudinal change towards the barriers' removal
54% of Catholic respondents reported a belief that the barriers would be removed in the future
34% of the PUL community agreed but 47% could not envisage this happening
More PUL respondents wanted to see the barriers removed within the next generation
28% of those from the CNR community wanted the barriers to come down 'now' in comparison to 22% of PUL respondents

Positively, despite the political turmoil currently happening in Northern Ireland, this community does not seem to have allowed it to impact on its hopes for the future. The 'Public Attitudes to Peace Walls Survey (Ulster University, 2015) found that 41% of respondents could envisage a time without the peace walls which increased to 45% of all respondents in this area.

When stratified by community identity, the data indicates that the CNR community is more in favour of the peace walls being removed now (28%) in comparison to their PUL neighbours (22%) but that they are also more in favour of retaining the status quo (CNR=15% and PUL=9%). The PUL community is more in favour to change to the barriers (30%) than the CNR community (22%).

As regards the future, both communities favour removal of the barriers at 'sometime in the future' but the CNR community are much more optimistic that this will happen (52%) in comparison to their PUL neighbours (34%). However, both communities express a strong desire for it to happen within the next generation (CNR=67% and PUL=75%).

The data from the survey overall indicates that the PUL community is more cautious in relation to considering the removal of the barriers and value a slower pace of change than the CNR community.

This is supported by the findings above regarding their safety and security fears and that those in the PUL community are much less likely to report that the barriers have 'no function' (PUL=9% to CNR=24%) and 'no positives' (PUL=14% to CNR=25%).

This is unsurprising given the findings above that indicate that the PUL community has greater confidence in the barriers to protect them. It is possible that by addressing these safety and security issues, there may be a corresponding positive impact on attitudes towards the removal of the barriers and a greater belief that this would benefit them, their families and their area.

This data is extremely important for DCP as it provides the baseline of current attitudes to the overarching aim of the PWP. Taken in totality, it indicates that hope for future removal of the peace walls exists with continuing fears of what this may bring. This may be addressed by the PWP with practical steps to address safety and security concerns to lessen fear of the 'other' but there is also a need for greater political leadership and input from statutory agencies to provide a realistic alternative to the barriers.

This finding once more underpins the importance of the approach taken by the PWP towards removal of the interface barriers, in that it can only move forward with community support and involvement and at a pace dictated by those communities most affected.
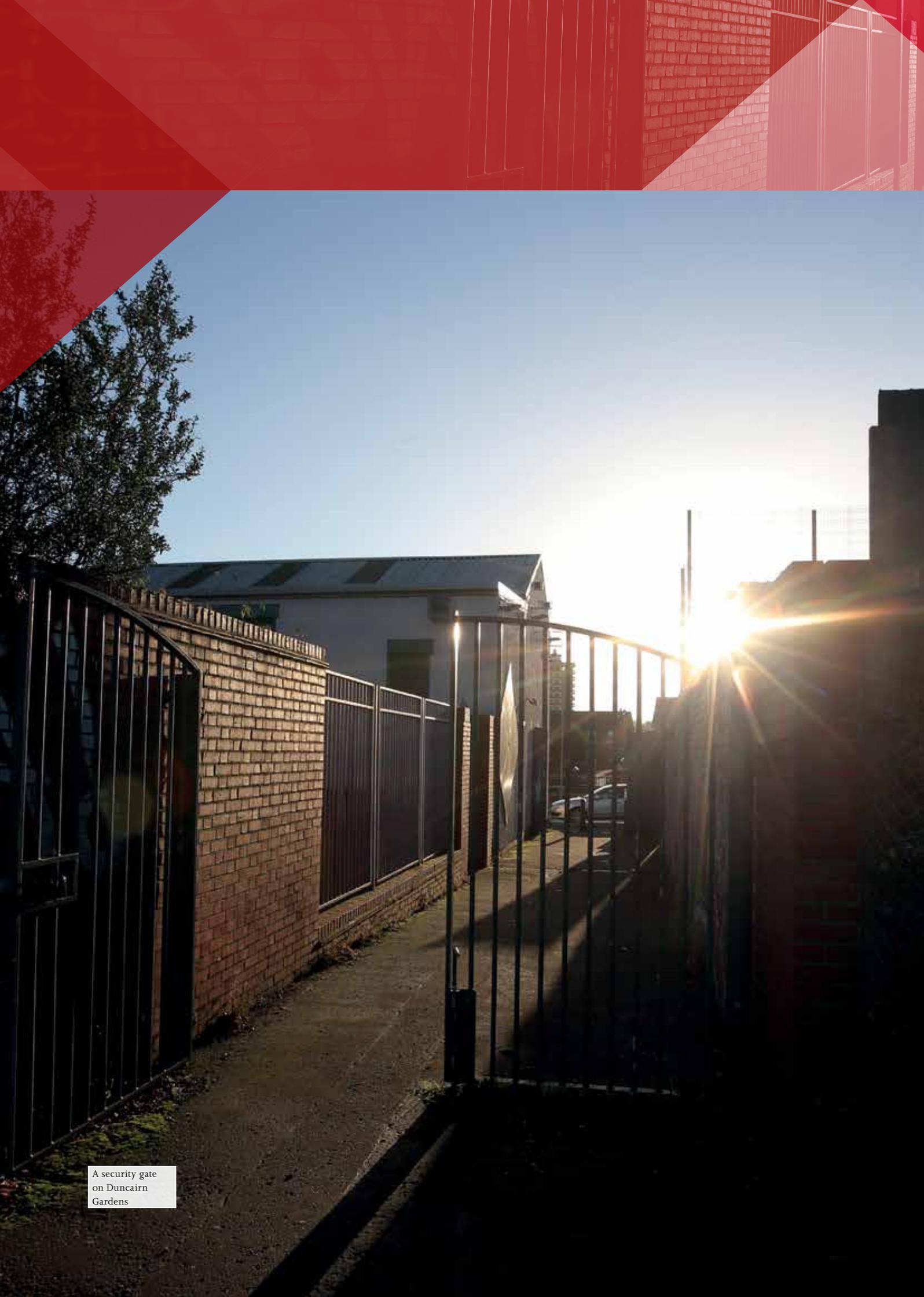
A security gate
on Duncairn
Gardens

Conclusion

The survey data provides clear challenges for the DCP PWP in developing their work in this area but also offers a clear baseline position to both extend their work and measure future attitudinal change as a result of targeted initiatives developed by them and other key stakeholder agencies to deal with the pressing concerns raised by residents in the area.

The greatest challenges for the PWP in the Lower North Belfast area are the continuing safety and security fears in particular within the PUL community. Moreover, the negative perception of younger people in this area and concerns about high reported levels of ASB need addressed, this time within the CNR community.

It should be acknowledged that the baseline data also highlights opportunities for development and progress. The most important of these is that, despite their lived experiences, hope stills exists within this area that change to the barriers will happen in the foreseeable future and that this is a matter they want to see addressed in their lifetime rather than passing it onto the next generation to resolve.

This hope is strengthened by two things. The data indicates that interaction levels between the two communities in this area is regular and, on the whole, positive. DCP can use this Programme to continue developing better community relations.

Secondly, there is already a level of ambivalence towards the peace walls (particularly within the CNR community) in relation to their functions and positive aspects. Encouraging residents to continue questioning their existence and offering viable alternatives to the barriers could lead to greater progress towards their removal.

However, this is tempered with the reality that any such change will require greater inter-agency collaboration and support for this work particularly in relation to cross-party political support and engagement.

It is clear that the process towards total removal of the peace walls will be dependent on the continuation of the PWP's work in building greater community confidence and local consensus that change to the barriers can and will bring positive outcomes for the communities most affected.

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Footnotes

1. Morrow, D. et al. The Long View of Community Relations in Northern Ireland: 1998 − 2012 (2013) p.1.

2. Ulster University have carried out such studies in 2012 and 2015.

3. Safety concerns are included in this as qualitative evidence from the surveys indicates that this is a fear of potential violence rather that actual violence.

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