

Belfast
Interface
Project

The Whitewell Youth Mediation Project

Engaging with Disaffected Youths in an Inter-
face Context

A Case Study

Erik Cownie

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Erik Cownie
Belfast Interface Project

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Belfast Interface Project
109 – 113 Royal Avenue
Belfast BT1 1FF
Tel 028 9024 2828
Fax 028 9031 4829
Email: info@belfastinterfaceproject.org
www.belfastinterfaceproject.org

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction:

The Whitewell communities have endured sustained inter-community violence and severe mobility restrictions for many years. For the past three years (2005-2008) there has been a concerted and multi-agency approach to address these ongoing issues. In this period there have been many positive developments, with the setting up of mobile phone networks and dialogue forums between voluntary interface and community workers from both sides of the divide. These developments have gone a long way to ease tensions and to produce a marked reduction in episodes of interface violence.

2. Background:

Despite such significant progress, many problems in the Whitewell area remained unresolved in early 2007. Sporadic youth-led violence especially at night continued to hamper attempts to build upon improved community relations. In short, the background to engaging with both groups of youths can be thus summarised:

- Despite advances in local (adult) cross-community engagement, youth-led violence and sporadic attacks were undermining progress;
- In the often, total absence of safe access onto the Whitewell Road, there was a growing sense of isolation and vulnerability amongst the unionist community of White City;
- Contact between communities kept breaking down due to weekend incidents, where *loss of control* over youth violence by local community activists was perceived on both sides as *lack of concern*;
- Such incidents were becoming more serious with the appearance of knives and other weapons, and more frequent;
- There was a real danger of collapse of the emergent dialogue and communication structures.

3. The Project:

Objectives of the Project:

1. To give participants the opportunity to identify problems faced by their communities and to contribute to finding solutions.
2. To bring an end to inter-community violence between the groups of young people.
3. To address the access restrictions encountered by both communities.
4. To support the development of relationships and structures between the youths of both communities to assist them in addressing future inter-community issues.

Preparation:

The White City interface workers and the co-ordinator of the Two Parks Project facilitated separate discussions with each group of youths and with other project partners. The purposes of these meetings were to:

- Determine if there was an appetite to engage with the ‘other’ community;
- Seek agreement on engagement and recruit 20 participants from each community;
- Devise a project framework and identify and manage associated risk.

The Whitewell Youth Mediation Project is based on giving young people the opportunity to:

- Identify and exchange their issues of concern and work to create solutions;
- Produce their own Community Charter and form their own Youth Community Forum.

Event One: Two groups of twenty youths from (unionist) White City and (nationalist) Lower Whitewell hold separate day long workshops in different rooms in the same venue, the Wellington Park Hotel.

Step 1: Each group of youths identify the issues that needed to be addressed.

Step 2: Each group agree on a vision for an improved future for their communities.

Step 3: Each group documents the steps that will have to be taken in order to realise this vision.

Event Two: A joint social activity is held involving both groups of youths. The two groups suggest and agree to go paint-balling at Randalstown. The aims of this second event were:

- To act as a reward / incentive for their efforts in events one and three;
- To give the participants an opportunity to experience a positive social interaction in a neutral venue.

Important factors in this element of the project were:

- The timing of this social event (between the two ‘working’ events).
- The neutrality of the event venue (safe space in which the young people could interact).
- That the event was held out of the area (away from any negative peer pressure).

Event Three: Both groups together attend a joint day long workshop at the Lansdowne Hotel.

Step 1: Presentations are made by each group suggesting rules for inclusion in the agreed Charter.

Step 2: Young people in mixed groups draft the charter based on these presentations and the issues, visions, and steps identified in Event 1.

Step 3: Both sets of youths as one group agree on the final Whitewell Youth Community Charter.

Step 4: Commitment is given by both groups to help devise and participate in a Youth Community Forum which would cover the Whitewell area.

Project Outcomes:

1. Participants identified the problems and are contributing to finding solutions.
2. Inter-community violence between the groups has dramatically reduced.
3. Relationships and structures have been created to enable them to address future issues.
4. Despite significant progress, safe access onto the Whitewell and Shore Roads remains problematic.

4. The Case Study:

The project partners, Intercomm, North Belfast Community Action Unit, Two Parks Project, Whitewell Transformation Project and Belfast Interface Project agreed that a case study of the project should be written up in terms of documenting best practice. This report documents the project and is supplemented within a framework of qualitative analysis through a variety of data collecting methods including informal interviews, focus groups and round table discussions with project participants and key stakeholders.

Key Issues:

- **Historical Traumas** experienced by the Whitewell communities, and their effect on inter-community relations;
- **Internal Influences** which discourage interaction and encourage hostility between interface communities;
- **Restricted Mobility** of many Whitewell residents caused and exacerbated by the denial of safe access, territoriality and hierarchical retaliation, and the lack of shared space;
- **Social Alienation** in the form of a) urban youth disaffection, b) social disconnection in relation to political and community structures, and c) economic disconnection of areas such as Whitewell within a twin speed city (Murtagh 2008).

6. Key Findings:

Intra and Inter-Community Development Work:

1. The work done for many years on a voluntary basis by the White City interface workers has been critical in containing and preventing inter-community violence.
2. The Whitewell mobile phone network (funded by IFI and CRC) and the interface forum meetings at Intercomm have been significant factors in developing relationships and reducing inter-community violence.
3. There is a significant degree of disconnection a) between the protestant community of the Whitewell and unionist politicians who are perceived as *disinterested* in the problems faced by White City and Graymount, and b) between the Longlands estate and neighbouring communities.
4. The deaths of three young local men and sustained inter-community violence in recent years have destabilised community relations and have reinforced perceptions of victimisation and besiegement in both communities.
5. Overtly sectarian forces within both communities continue to encourage hostility and discourage positive interaction between the Whitewell communities and are seen to have a definite impact on the behaviours and fears of members of their own community.

Access and Equality:

6. Restricted access and the denial of safe passage are pronounced challenges facing the Whitewell communities, with much of the interface conflict in the area having a tribal / territorial motivation and basis.
7. Communities in the Whitewell area, with their own access and safe passage restrictions, vent their territorial frustrations on smaller clusters of the 'other' community in a form of hierarchical retaliation.

8. The lack of shared space in the Whitewell area is preventing further progress. Youths from both communities who want to create and maintain social connections with the 'other' community have no safe space to interact.
9. In measuring 'proximity to services' the NIMDM deprivation indices misleadingly equate distance with access. This calculation, based on the measurement of distance, takes no account of denied access or chill factors relating to the 'other' community. The result is that anomalies or spikes appear in the indices which a) mask serious mobility disadvantage, and b) distort the overall picture of a community's true level of deprivation.
10. The denial of access is a denial of equality. There is of course a wide span of levels of restrictions which affect spatial mobility in relation to interface communities. This span ranges from preferred avoidance, to likely and actual assaults. Somewhere near the top end of the span of levels of restrictions faced by interface communities, these denials of access (certainly those involving actual assaults) veer into hate crime territory.

Engaging with Young People:

11. The issue of underage drinking in the Whitewell area is described by community workers, local politicians, and a senior PSNI officer as *widespread* and *endemic*.
12. There is heavy and persistent use of drugs by many young people in the Whitewell area.
13. There is serious concern over the recent emergence and use of knives in the Whitewell area.
14. Youth engagement processes which work with only with the problem *secondary* generation of teenagers are undermined by a) the negative influence of the older *third* generation, and b) lack of preparatory work with the younger *primary* generation which will replace them.
15. The Two Parks Project youth engagement process with the Lower Whitewell was the catalyst for that project's interactions with the youths from White City, proving the value of designated and targeted youth provision.

7. Development Opportunities: A 15 point Suggested Programme for Short Term Action

In this section we draw on the experience of the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project to set out a series of specific recommendations for action, which we feel should be supported over the next 12 months.

7.1 The Youth Mediation Project:

1. Resources need to be made available to further develop the project by a) building on the progress and relationship between White City and the Lower Whitewell and b) expanding the scope of the project to include the Graymount and Longlands estates.
2. The format of the project is considered as a template and model of good practice in engaging with disaffected youths and worthy of consideration in other interface contexts where practicable and feasible.

7.2 Intra and Inter-Community Development Work:

3. The voluntary work of the White City interface workers is underpinned to maintain and build upon the significant improvements in interface relations in the Whitewell area. It is unrealistic to suppose that this process can be further developed without infrastructure and properly resourced programmes. Funding for development posts within White City is also required as it is equally unrealistic to expect this vital (full time) development work to be carried out by people who are sustained only by social security benefits.
4. The communication structures between the Whitewell communities such as the (IFI / CRC funded) mobile phone network and interface forum meetings need to be expanded to include neighbouring communities such as Longlands and Bawnmore.
5. Intra-community processes are initiated and supported to address overtly sectarian attitudes which discourage positive interaction and encourage hostility between the communities.
6. Multi-agency community partnerships (where the PSNI and other agencies address a community's needs as identified through environmental audits) are established to address community concerns such as anti-social behaviour.
7. 'Reconnection' processes are initiated to address (a) the 'detachment' of the Longlands estate in relation to the wider Whitewell community, and (b) the perception amongst many within the protestant community of Whitewell that 'their' politicians are *absent, and disinterested*.
8. Policy makers in planning, housing, neighbourhood renewal, community development and community relations need to be engaged in a discussion about the implications of the project for their individual and collective roles in Whitewell.

7.3 Access and Equality:

9. Inter-community processes are initiated and supported to urgently address restrictions in local mobility onto the Whitewell and Shore Roads.
10. Key stakeholders in the Whitewell area (including the two integrated schools) are supported in exploring opportunities for the creation of shared space.
11. NISRA, through NIMDM and other deprivation indices, find new ways of accurately measuring proximity to services which take account of denied access and chill factors relating to the 'other' community.
12. The denial of access needs to be acknowledged as a form of hate crime and freedom of access is measured and used as an indicator of equality.

7.4 Youth Work:

13. The chronic under-resourcing of youth provision in the Whitewell area is addressed with designated youth workers and appropriate youth programmes in each community.

14. As part of a significant investment in youth provision, adequately resourced programmes aimed at addressing endemic underage drinking, drug use and anti-social behaviour are implemented in the Whitewell area.
15. Future youth engagement processes in the Whitewell area are framed round the concept of the *triple track approach*, which engages with the three youth generations at the same time, i.e. the 'problem' *secondary* generation of teenagers who are (a) negatively influenced by an older *third* generation, and (b) eventually replaced by the younger *primary* generation.

8. Policy Implications

8.1 The Need for a Comprehensive Interface Strategy

- a) This study has highlighted the need for serious, coordinated and long term support for interface work. There is, currently, high level and international momentum behind a renewed aspiration to rid Belfast of physical interface structures over time. There is a disconnection, however, between this aspiration and the on the ground support needed to make it happen. Initiatives such as the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project have been successful in reducing tension, changing the local context for more meaningful cross-community engagement, and beginning to improve the quality of life for people 'trapped' in segregated territory. It has not removed interface structures, nor has it addressed all the problems of access. However, it is the start of a local development process that acknowledges the patient, high risk, long-term and complex nature of any process which effectively tackles the fear, territoriality, manipulation and sectarianism that creates and maintains 'peacelines' across the city.
- b) This type of intervention has been delivered on an incremental, project and crisis response basis and the effectiveness of these processes is limited by weak and inadequate funding and official support. The project highlights the need for a comprehensive **Interface Strategy**, developed by OFMDFM in partnership with policy makers responsible for urban regeneration, planning, housing, policing and community development. This would take the form of an agreed objective in the Programme for Government with cross-party support in the Executive. Specifically, the strategy would:
 - Develop a process of local consultation that engages the people, not just elected representatives and community leaders, in an open debate about the impact of interfaces and how they would like to see these changed;
 - Develop an agreed set of objectives about the future of interfaces, including a longer term process of negotiated removal based on the feasibility, desirability and risk associated with such an option;
 - Determine a series of area based programmes to support interventions to address the effects of interfacing on surrounding communities;
 - Promote the agreement of specific commitments by the police, housing, transport, urban regeneration and community development agencies to support actions to reinforce the redevelopment of these places;

- Promote the adoption of interface areas as a separate land use category which would prioritise, help coordinate and ensure delivery of actions in these areas;
- Promote a dedicated youth intervention strategy to develop and apply practice to other communities and areas; we have suggested how that programme might be developed earlier in this section;
- Dedicate sufficient resources, identified in the Programme for Government and associated budget, to support the strategy; and
- Include a clear monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure that progress is being made against agreed objectives for each area.

Some Key Agency Responsibilities:

It is also important that the implications of the Whitewell project are placed on the desks of key organisations with responsibilities in this area. These include:

- Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships (and their respective strategies) need to ensure that there is financial and resource support for front line projects, especially where they engage young people in interface locations. We have also noted the complex interplay between lack of access, deprivation and social problems including drug and alcohol misuse that can only be meaningfully addressed by comprehensive well-resourced area based strategies.
- However, it is also important that the Department for Social Development's urban regeneration group prioritise interface issues and youth intervention specifically, particularly as Regeneration Frameworks are being prepared by area partnerships across Belfast. Here, it is also vital that Belfast City Council prioritise interfacing as a policy issue and in its support for community based projects. The Council has carried out a number of innovative projects on planning and community relations under its *good relations* programme and the delivery of this programme could assist in the direction of resources toward interface interventions.
- Linked to this, it is also important that the Community Relations Council build on its commitment to strengthen interventions in 'peaceline' areas in ways that support realistic negotiated interventions for their ultimate removal over time. Without restructuring local relations, tackling lack of access and dealing with serious socio-economic deprivation, any discussion about the short term removal of interfaces is, in our experience, premature and counter-productive. Here, community development funding by DSD, NICVA and the Councils needs to build the capacities that have helped to make the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project a success.
- It should be emphasised, however, that problems of access are not just about good relations and that imaginative interventions are required to better connect enclave communities with facilities, jobs, training and sites of enjoyment. A review of public and community transport schemes could ensure that they are sensitised to the way in which people in places such as White City actually use the neighbourhood services around them. This could result in the development of transport systems that are flexible, responsive to demand and negotiate the territorial barriers that accentuate the exclusion we have shown in this case study.
- The concept of 'designing out crime', alongside community policing, also has an important role to play and it is important that District Policing Partnerships identify interfaces as a strategic priority.

- Finally, policy areas around the built environment including housing and planning need to more clearly respond to the information contained in this case study report of the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project. We noted earlier that the designation of interface areas in planning zoning would help to prioritise the spatial effects on communities that surround them. Housing management and planning also need to explore how pedestrian and car-based access is designed to allow safe and easy movement from interface areas.

Interface areas require the same intensive planning, resources and organisational leadership that have made areas such as *Laganside* in Belfast such a success. Without the same high level policy, financial and political commitment, 'peacelines' are always likely to hallmark those parts of the city that have not benefited from peace and economic progress in the way that other places have. This case study demonstrates the art of the possible and sets out some positive recommendations about how, when and where to intervene to help create new hope and opportunity at the interface.

1. Introduction:

The Whitewell Youth Mediation Project is an initiative to address youth-led interface violence, mobility restrictions and contemporary urban youth issues at a local level. This report is a case study of this ongoing project, documented through interviews and focus group discussions with project partners and participants. The problems of interface violence, restricted mobility and urban disaffection which these communities continue to face are serious impediments to the creation of a shared and equal society. Although some of the issues raised in this report are specific to the Whitewell area, many are not. In other interface areas very comparable sets of difficulties exist and impact similarly on the lives of residents.

This report highlights severe and ongoing disadvantage faced by Whitewell interface communities ten years after the Good Friday Agreement. In the wider context, the absence of armed conflict, seemingly stable political structures and promises of multi-million dollar investment have encouraged new debates on the future of investment unfriendly barriers and the plight of the communities such barriers were erected to protect (Jarman 2008). This report aims to contribute to these debates by a) illuminating the issues emerging from this Whitewell study, and b) making recommendations that may be applied or considered in other interface areas.

1.1 Project Partners:

The agency partners involved in the funding, management, and facilitation of the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project were:

- **Intercomm** - Founded in 1995 as a direct response to grassroots community concerns about inter-community conflict and social deprivation in north Belfast;
- **Two Parks Youth Project (TPYP)** – This project is a partnership between the Greencastle and Newton communities, working through the Ashton Community Trust;
- **Whitewell Transformation Project (WTP)** –This embryonic group represents the coming together of key influencers, voluntary interface workers and concerned residents from the protestant / unionist / loyalist (PUL) community of White City;
- **North Belfast Community Action Unit (NBCAU)** – Part of the Department for Social Development, the Unit was set up in August 2002;
- **Belfast Interface Project (BIP)** - Established in 1995 with a remit to identify and seek to address the major issues of concern to interface communities in Belfast.
(Fuller details of all project partners are included in the Appendix)

1.2 Project Participants:

The project's target group was those young people (predominately males aged 15 – 19 years old) who were involved, or had influence over others involved, in recreational or sectarian violence at the Whitewell Road interfaces. The project's participants were two groups of twenty youths (aged 15 – 19) from the PUL community of White City, and the catholic / nationalist / republican (CNR) community of Lower Whitewell. The recruitment of the individual youths making up these groups, and the preparatory internal development work was undertaken by a) White City interface workers from the Whitewell Transformation Project, and b) within the Lower Whitewell by the Two Parks Youth Project. The project envisaged these initial participants as peer educators for their own wider communities.

2. The Case Study:

2.1 Rationale of Case Study:

The partner agencies in the project agreed that the project should be written up in terms of documenting best practice. To that end, it was decided to produce a case study detailing the project work to date. This paper is aimed at groups, agencies, funders and other statutory bodies whose concern is addressing issues of disaffection, and recreational / sectarian violence amongst young people at interface areas.

The central aims of this paper are to:

- Document the work of the project to date in support of further development of the local process;
- Contribute to the knowledge base in terms of models of effective practice in youth engagement at interfaces;
- Legitimise and acknowledge the work of local interface and community workers;
- Give voice and expression to the contribution of participating local youths;
- Frame the project within the context of the ongoing wider processes of local inter-community engagement;
- Identify the issues which impact on the lives and mobility of residents in the Whitewell area;
- Make recommendations which will assist access, safe passage and engagement opportunities within the Whitewell area.

2.2 Methodology:

Qualitative Analysis:

The research element of this case study was conducted within the framework of qualitative analysis. This particular strategy was chosen for the following reasons:

- This would increase the potential for fuller understanding of individual participants' / project partners' interpretation of the project's development and outcomes;
- The natural settings of the qualitative research supported a more holistic understanding of the issues, themes and findings of the project (Morgan et al 2000);
- In respect of documenting best practice and examining the project's applicability as a model of effective youth engagement in other interface areas, it was felt important to give voice and expression to the personal accounts of individual participants as well as key informants;
- The span of such accounts set alongside quantitative social data (crime statistics, deprivation indices etc.) support the contextualisation of the case study findings.

2.3 Data Collection:

Methods:

Within the framework of the qualitative analysis adopted for this case study, a variety of data collecting methods were employed as follows:

a) Informal interviews with:

Individual youth participants from both areas (White City and Lower Whitewell);

Project partners;

Key informants such as PSNI, Housing Executive, community representatives, political representatives, local educationalists.

b) Discussions with:

Focus groups comprising 5-8 participating youths from both areas;

Round table discussions with statutory and voluntary agencies within the sector.

Themes:

The following six themes were used to guide the above interviews and discussions:

- Historical context of local inter-community relations;
- Perceptions amongst participants of own community, other community & the wider / joint community;
- Examination of similarities and distinctions between communities;
- Perceptions of the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project;
- Significance / impact / outcomes of the project;
- Long term viability / applicability of the project as a model of intervention.

Collation:

The qualitative evidence is supported by collation of findings from previous documentation and data from:

- Findings, reports, and feedback from project preparatory intra community work with participants and events 1, 2, and 3;
- Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM 2005) of deprivation, educational attainment etc;
- Public reports from PSNI, Housing Executive, etc;
- The North Belfast Community Action Unit (NBCAU) mapping exercise of current youth and community development provision and programmes.

3. Background to the Project:

3.1 Segregation:

Social division and segregation are endemic within our society. In Northern Ireland segregation has been a characteristic of urban life since the nineteenth century (Boal 1995). This is especially the case in Belfast where segregation, as a spatial outcome of violence, has been and remains most pronounced (Boal 1995, Doherty and Poole 1995, Shirlow 2006). While this segregation has deepened and intensified during periods of inter-community violence, it historically has not returned to pre-violence levels during more peaceful times (Boal 1995, Hall 1998, Jarman 2002). This 'ratchet' effect allows for only one overall trend, that of 'inexorably upwards' (Doherty and Poole 1995). The deepening of segregation during the 'conflict years' is illustrated by Shuttleworth and Lloyds' (2007) mapping of segregation in Belfast. The proportions of households in 'polarised estates' (more than 80% catholic or 80% protestant) for the years 1971, 1991 and 2001 were:

Households in polarised estates 1971 – 2001	1971	1991	2001
More than 80% Catholic & less than 20% Catholic	68.82%	97.23%	94.77%
More than 80% Protestant & less than 20% Protestant	60.96%	87.65%	93.13%

3.2 Interface Disadvantage:

If polarisation and segregation have come to characterise Belfast, so too have the interfaces which keep the segregated apart. This report is concerned with interface communities and the multiple disadvantage they continue to suffer. In his study of Belfast's peacelines (Murtagh 1994) contended that many communities living in interface areas routinely experienced:

- High levels of social and economic disadvantage;
- High levels of ongoing violence and intimidation;
- Restricted access to facilities and services perceived as being located within the 'other' community.

Twelve years later, Donnelly (2006) and Shirlow & Murtagh (2006) reported that these remained key areas of disadvantage and that there had been little improvement in these areas. Donnelly further warned that the 'statutory abandonment' of interface areas was prolonging the disadvantage which the 'troubles' had bestowed on interface communities. Shirlow & Murtagh supported this view, adding that both during and since the 'troubles' these interface areas have been characterised by danger and deprivation.

- One third of all the conflict related deaths in Belfast during the 'troubles' took place within 250 metres of an interface (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006).
- More than three quarters of the physical interfaces in Belfast lie within the top ten (Noble indices) most deprived wards in Northern Ireland. (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006)

In the same year, Hargie et al (2006) in a study of sectarianism, unemployment and social exclusion of young people in Northern Ireland, found that young people from interface communities often face the double penalty of serious problems linked to poverty while at the same time suffering from

the effects of sectarianism. Hargie et al concluded that this double penalty serves to exacerbate social exclusion in interface areas, especially as sectarianism was perceived by many of the study's respondents as having increased since the Good Friday Agreement.

3.3 The North Belfast Context:

North Belfast is home to many interface communities and many of the interfaces which serve as 'fracture zones' and barriers between them (Jarman, 2002). In 2005 The Belfast Interface Project commissioned research, undertaken by Institute Conflict Research (ICR), which identified 41 NIO recognised interfaces, 20 of which were located in North Belfast. In 2008, BIP commissioned ICR to map the range of defensive architecture in interface areas including, but not confined to, NIO authorised structures. The number of identified interface structures was estimated at 83. North Belfast is home to 40 of these barriers, five of which are in the Whitewell area (Jarman 2008).

1996 was a very difficult year for North Belfast interface communities. Over a hundred families left their homes due to fear and had to seek alternative housing in the wake of localised violence which followed two major flashpoints: the tour of the North parade in June and Drumcree in July (Jarman 2002). Up until this time Whitewell nationalists and White City unionists had co-existed relatively peacefully (Hansson 2005). Recurrent inter-community violence from 1996 led to a 200 metre long fence being erected in 1999 (Hansson 2005). In 2007 yet another fence was constructed, this time to protect the residents of the (catholic / mixed) Throne estate. Nine years after the Good Friday Agreement, in the grounds of Hazelwood Integrated Primary School, a 25 foot high barrier was constructed in response to fractured community relations (Jarman 2008).

3.4 The Whitewell Context:

In this report there are many references to the deaths, within a ten month period in 2000 /2001, of three local young men; they were:

Thomas McDonald aged 16 from the White City estate, killed at the Whitewell Road interface on September 4th 2001.

Daniel McColgan aged 20 from the Longlands estate, shot dead as he arrived for work as a postal worker in Rathcoole on January 12th 2002.

Gerard Lawlor aged 19 from the upper Whitewell area, shot dead on Floral Road as he walked home from the Antrim Road on July 22nd 2002

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7468312.stm)

In the period 1996 to 2007, the Whitewell communities endured further sustained inter-community violence and severe mobility restrictions. For the past three years (2005-2008) there has been a concerted and multi-agency approach to addressing these ongoing issues. In this period there have been many positive developments including the setting up of mobile phone networks and dialogue forums between voluntary interface and community workers from both sides of the divide. These developments have gone some considerable way towards easing tensions and producing a marked reduction in episodes of interface violence. Trustful relationships have also engendered collaboration between community activists from both communities. Joint representations based on mutual benefit have been made to agencies such as a) the DOE, i.e. in relation to lay-out proposals

of road and bridge upgrades, which impact on interface control and management issues, b) the NIO, i.e. in relation to structural amendments to, and 'gating procedures' of, physical interfaces, and c) the PSNI, i.e. in relation to communications, the deployment of police resources and community based approaches to tackling interface disorder, sectarian attacks and anti-social behaviour.

3.5 Need for the Project:

Despite such significant progress, many problems in the Whitewell area remained unresolved in early 2007. Sporadic youth-led violence especially at night continued to hamper attempts to build upon improved community relations. Attacks led to fear, mistrust, increasingly restricted mobility, and acts of cyclical retaliation (Allport 1987, Deutch and Coleman 2006). In short, the background to engaging with both groups of youths in an attempt to break this cycle can be thus summarised:

- Despite advances in local (adult) cross-community engagement, youth-led violence and sporadic attacks were undermining progress;
- In the often total absence of safe access onto the Whitewell Road, there was a growing sense of isolation and vulnerability within the unionist community of White City;
- Contact between communities kept breaking down due to weekend incidents, where *loss of control* over youth violence by local community activists was perceived on both sides as *lack of concern*;
- Such incidents were becoming more serious with the appearance of knives and other weapons, and more frequent;
- There was a real danger of collapse of the emergent dialogue and communication structures.

It was at this time (May 2007) that the co-ordinator of the Two Parks Youth Project, a satellite project of the Ashton Community Trust, took up his post. This appointment and the co-ordinator's engagement with loyalist interface workers from White City were the catalyst for the development of the Youth Mediation Project. It was from these consultations to pro-actively address the issues of youth-led violence within the Whitewell area, that the framework of the project was formed.

4. Key Demographics:

For the purposes of this report, The Whitewell area is made up of these main areas:

- The large predominantly nationalist estates of Longlands and Bawnmore;
- The smaller predominantly nationalist Lower Whitewell estate;
- The small nationalist / mixed Throne estate;
- The predominantly unionist estates of White City and Graymount.

These areas, which encompass the scope of this study, lie in the two electoral wards of Bellevue and Valley.

- White City, Lower Whitewell Road and Graymount lie within the Bellevue ward.
- Longlands and Bawnmore lie within the Valley ward.

4.1 Demography:

The statistics below are from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), specifically those from the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS). Crime and Justice Statistics are from PSNI Records of Recorded Crime 2005 / 2006 (full tables are contained within the Appendix).

According to the 2001 Census, the demographic breakdown in terms of community background for the Bellevue ward was:

- 60.7% from a Catholic Community Background (Northern Ireland 43.8%);
- 35.2% from a Protestant and Other Christian Background (Northern Ireland 53.1%).

The corresponding figures for the Valley ward were:

- 51.5% from a 'Catholic Community Background' (North Belfast 44.9%);
- 45.2% from a 'Protestant and Other Christian Background' (North Belfast 51.9%).

4.2 Deprivation:

This NISRA sourced data is based on the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2005 (NIMDM 2005). The below listed ranks range from 1 (most deprived) to 582 (least deprived):

- Bellevue ward is the 184th most deprived ward in Northern Ireland;
- Valley is the 70th most deprived ward in Northern Ireland.

Ward ranks from NIMDM 2005*	Bellevue ward (rank)	Valley ward (rank)
Multiple Deprivation Measure	184	70
Income Domain	184	88
Employment Domain	207	83
Health Deprivation and Disability Domain	75	61
Education, Skills and Training Domain	254	72
Proximity to Services Domain	493	506
Living Environment Domain	272	129
Crime and Disorder Domain	37	47

The 'Proximity to Services' domain is based on the calculation of distance between 'home' and 'service' and takes no account of mobility restrictions or chill factors relating to the 'other' community. Therefore (as further examined in the discussion section), this anomalous particular measurement of deprivation paints a somewhat misleading picture:

- Bellevue is the 493rd most deprived ward in terms of Proximity to Services (or the 89th least);
- Valley is the 506th most deprived ward in terms of Proximity to Services (or the 76th least).

4.3 Education, Employment and Economic Activity:

- Bellevue is the 184th most deprived ward in terms of Income Domain. Valley is the 88th;
- Bellevue is the 207th most deprived ward in terms of Employment. Valley is the 83rd;
- Bellevue is the 254th most deprived ward in terms of Education, Skills and Training Domain. Valley is the 72nd;
- Only 14.3% of Valley ward school leavers continued on into further education compared to Bellevue 20.3%, and a Northern Ireland average of 38.2%;
- 17.4% of persons in Valley aged between 18 and 59 claimed income support, compared to Bellevue 12.6%, and a Northern Ireland average of 10.8%.

4.4 Health and Care:

- Valley is the 61st most deprived ward in terms of Health Deprivation and Disability Domain;
- 28% of people in Valley have a limiting long term illness compared to 22.4% in Bellevue and a Northern Ireland average of 20.4%;
- Bellevue is the 75th most deprived ward in terms of Health Deprivation and Disability Domain;
- 67% of people in Bellevue said their health was good, compared to 61.4% in Valley and a Northern Ireland average of 70%.

4.5 Crime and Justice:

- According to NISRA Crime and Disorder Domain statistics, the Bellevue ward ranks as the 37th most deprived wards in Northern Ireland (out of a total of 582);
- In this Domain the Valley ward is ranked 47th most deprived;
- In 2005 - 2006 there were 419 offences recorded in the Bellevue ward, 46.1 % of which were criminal damage; in the same period there were 612 offences recorded in the Valley ward.

5. *The Project:*

5.1 Outline of Project:

Process Formulation and the Management of Risk:

The formulation and design stages were crucial to the delivery of the project. Central concerns of the formulation stage were to a) identify risk in the proposed process, and b) put in place control measures with which to manage this risk. As detailed in the discussion section, there was a great deal of uncertainty in this process amongst both community workers and young participants. There was little doubt that the project was not without risk. There was a concern that collapse of the process, or failure of the project to improve the situation could contribute to the worsening of inter-community violence, further destabilising inter-community relations. To mitigate against such a scenario, the following control measures were adopted to minimise risk in this intervention:

- The patient process of preparation and planning the various elements of the project to ensure that wherever possible participants did not in any way feel threatened within their own community, the 'other' community or at any neutral event venues;
- The selection of facilitators was based on a) the legitimacy they were afforded by both the community and the young people, and b) the authenticity the facilitators established with all the stakeholders within the statutory sector;
- Agreement and varying degrees of 'buy-in' were sought from parents/guardians of participants who were regularly kept informed of the project's development through information/consent sheets.
- Risk assessment was made a continuous feature of the process with regular 'risk control' meetings involving project partners, community reps and external agencies such as PSNI

The White City interface workers and the co-ordinator of the Two Parks Project initiated an engagement process involving the two groups of youths. The four key objectives of this process were to:

- Give participants the opportunity to identify the problems faced by their communities, and contribute to finding solutions;
- Bring an end to inter-community violence between the groups;
- Address the access restrictions encountered by both communities;
- Support the development of relationships and structures between the youths of both communities which would enable them to address future inter-community issues.

Project workers began by facilitating separate discussions with each group. The purposes of these meetings were to:

- Determine if there was an appetite to engage with the 'other' community;
- Seek agreement on the terms of such engagement;
- Recruit 20 participants from within each community.

Following on from these meetings, and given the level of mistrust between the two groups of youths, it was decided that positive engagement would be facilitated through a mediation process. The Two Parks Project's Co-ordinator and the White City interface workers then developed a framework for

the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project. The methods of this proposed mediation were based on giving young people from both communities the opportunity to:

- Identify and exchange their issues of concern in respect of interface and cross-community relations;
- Work together to create workable solutions to such issues;
- Produce their own 'Community Charter' outlining acceptable / unacceptable behaviour;
- Form their own Youth Community Forum within which to a) further develop local processes of youth interaction and b) enact and monitor adherence to their agreed Charter.

The co-ordinator and interface workers then held a round table discussion with staff from Intercomm, North Belfast Community Action Unit and Belfast Interface Project where a programme for the project was devised. It is important to note that a key strength of the process was the range of skill sets brought to the table by the project partners. These included community workers with specialised knowledge of youth work, interface management, local issues, funding streams and relevant local and central government policies. This diverse set of skills and experience proved invaluable in the design stage of the project. Furthermore, these same people as facilitators in the project events were again called upon to use these skill sets.

The programme was based on the following events:

Event 1: (19/11/07) Two groups of twenty youths from (predominantly unionist) White City and (predominantly nationalist) Lower Whitewell hold separate day long workshops in different rooms, in the same venue (the Wellington Park Hotel).

The aims of this first event were:

- For the young people to identify and list the issues and problems they experience within their living environment;
- For the young people to likewise envision their hopes for a changed and improved community in the future;
- For the young people to suggest the steps that would have to be taken in order to achieve this improved future for their community.

Event 2: (23/11/07) A joint social activity is held involving both groups of youths. The two groups suggest and agree to go Paint-Balling in Randalstown.

The aims of this second event were:

- To act as a reward for their efforts in event one and an incentive for their involvement in event three;
- To give the participants an opportunity to experience a positive social interaction in a neutral venue.

Event 3: (27/11/07) Both groups together attend a joint day long workshop at the Lansdowne Hotel.

The aims of this third event were:

- For both groups of young people to present to each other their *issues, visions, and steps* as identified at Event 1;
- For both groups to agree *joint* issues, visions, and steps;

- For both groups to agree to a ‘Youth Community Charter’ which would set out rules which were rights based and grounded on the principles of respect for diversity;
- For both groups to agree to form and delegate representatives to a Youth Community Forum which would meet regularly to discuss Charter issues, and would be framed within the wider context of ongoing community relations work in the area.

5.2 Outputs of the Project:

5.2.1 Event One: The White City youth group and the young people from Lower Whitewell hold separate workshops at the Wellington Park Hotel.

Step 1: Each group of youths identifies the issues that they feel need to be addressed.

Step 2: Each group agrees on a vision for an improved future for their communities.

Step 3: Each group documents the steps that will have to be taken in order to realise this vision.

Issues as identified by the White City youth group:

- No safe access onto the Whitewell Road;
- Mobility restrictions in relation to shops, parks, bus stops, Abbey Centre, and other local amenities;
- Fear of attack in relation to school bus;
- Fear of violence and injury, made worse with the recent emergence of knives and other weapons;
- Intimidation and bullying by older, bigger and larger (in numerical terms) gangs of nationalist youths;
- Restricted opportunities in relation to employment, *“it costs more to get in and out of White City safely, taxis etc., for a job to be financially worthwhile”*;
- Taunting and abuse from nationalist community in relation to the death of Thomas McDonald;
- Destruction of the Thomas McDonald memorial, i.e. flowers, etc. ripped up;
- Lack of amenities within White City (made all the more acute by the sense of confinement resulting from restricted mobility from the estate).

Issues as identified by the Lower Whitewell youth group:

- Fear of being attacked by White City, Graymount or Shore Road;
- Restricted access (chiefly in relation to the Shore Road);
- Intimidation and orchestration of violence via the internet (social networking sites such as Bebo), texting, and mobile phones;
- *Shrine* (on Whitewell Road) to Thomas McDonald seen as *magnet* for confrontation;
- PSNI viewed as being partial to unionist community;
- CCTV cameras on Whitewell Road deemed as for the protection of unionist community only;
- Lack of facilities / activities for Lower Whitewell youths;
- Disruption to community caused by *orange* parades;
- No safe opportunities for cross community youth activities / engagement;
- The emergence of knives and other weapons in recent episodes of interface violence.

Vision of an improved community as expressed by the White City youth group:

- Freedom of access (onto Whitewell Road) would mean a better life;

- Fighting across the interface could be replaced by the building of new friendships;
- Being able to mix with the other community without fear;
- Being able to bring catholics back (into the White City estate) without any problems;
- Being able to mix with the other community, but not to live in the same estate;
- The memory of Thomas McDonald is no longer disrespected.

Vision of improved community as expressed by the Lower Whitewell youth group:

- All sections of the Whitewell community feel safe to use all the amenities on the Whitewell Road;
- The Whitewell Road becomes a *weapons free* area;
- More facilities and activities are available for local youths;
- New relationships are built between the two communities;
- Opportunities are created for safe cross community interaction and the sharing of space.

Steps necessary to advance this vision as deemed by the White City youth group:

- Youth workers on both sides to work with young people to stop interface fighting;
- Intimidation and orchestration of interface violence via internet, etc. stops;
- The green side place adult reps at bus stops during school time, and at shops etc. at night to make the orange side feel more secure;
- The White City community centre is utilised more and includes provision for (simultaneous) use by both communities;
- Agreements in relation to interface conduct are made with green side youths, and regular meetings are held between both sets of youths to ensure both sides keep their side of the bargain.

Steps necessary to advance this vision as deemed by the Lower Whitewell youth group:

- All attacks, and all carrying of knives and other weapons must stop immediately;
- There needs to be an agreed code of conduct amongst both sets of youths;
- Everyone in the area must desist from starting and attending interface rioting;
- We must all strive to make each other feel safe;
- There is a need to draw a line under recent incidents and begin a fresh start in cross community relations;
- Local youths need to be involved in parade discussions.

5.2.2 Event Two: The joint social event, paint–balling at Randalstown.

This element of the project gave the groups the opportunity to come together in a supervised and neutral environment. The teams were mixed and the event was a positive interaction. The value of taking the youths out of their daily environment and removing them from the (at times discouraging) peer pressure within their own communities is defined within the individual interviews (see section 6.2 & 6.3) and focus group discussions (see section 6.1). It is suffice at this stage to say that a) the timing of this social event (between the two ‘working’ events), b) the neutrality of the event venue, and c) the fact that the event was held out of the area, were all positive factors in this element of the project.

5.2.3 Event Three: (27/11/07) Held at the Lansdowne Hotel Belfast.

Step 1: Presentations are made by each group of youths suggesting rules for inclusion in the jointly agreed charter;

Step 2: Young people in mixed group workshops draft the joint charter based on these presentations and the issues, visions, and steps identified in Event 1;

Step 3: Both sets of youths as one group agree to the final draft of the Whitewell Youth Community Charter;

Step 4: A commitment is given by both groups to help devise and participate in a Youth Community Forum which will cover the Whitewell area.

The White City youths presented their issues, etc. (see 5.2.1) and summarised by suggesting that the following be considered for inclusion in the agreed Charter document:

- Everyone has the right to use the amenities in the surrounding area (schools, shops, dentist, doctors, Abbey Centre etc.) without fear;
- Ownership of, and access to the Whitewell area is shared by everyone;
- Everyone has the right to live free from physical attack / verbal intimidation;
- Bullying can't hide behind sectarianism. Call it what it is, simple bullying;
- The Whitewell area is a weapons free area;
- Everyone has the right to safely use public transport to school / work / tech;
- Mutual respect must be shown to different cultures and traditions;
- Thomas McDonald and all others who died as a result of the conflict should be allowed to rest in peace;
- Both communities need to examine *why we hate each other*.

The Lower Whitewell youths presented their issues etc. (see 5.2.1) and summarised by suggesting the following be considered for inclusion in the agreed Charter document:

- We (Lower Whitewell) agree to respect White City;
- The Whitewell Road belongs to everyone. All services, shops etc. should be open to all;
- Equal rights means equal respect, being shown it, and giving it;
- Everyone has the right to express themselves freely without fear of attack;
- No one has the right to physically or verbally attack anyone;
- No one has the right to remove anyone else's rights;
- We (Lower Whitewell and White City) will not get involved in starting trouble;
- We (Lower Whitewell and White City) have a responsibility to make others feel safe;
- We all have a responsibility to create opportunities for safe cross community interactions.

The Charter suggestions were examined in workshops (mixed groups of five – six youths). Agreement was reached on the content of the Youth Community Charter, which was endorsed by both groups in a joint session. Both groups also committed to devise and participate in a Whitewell Youth Community Forum. The agreed Charter is detailed below.

We the youth of White City and the Lower Whitewell affirm that:

- The Whitewell Road belongs to all;
- Shops and all services should be equally accessible to all;
- Respect as a basis of rights should be reciprocal;
- Everyone has the right to talk and walk freely without fear of verbal or physical attack;
- No one has the right to remove or challenge the rights of others;
- Respect and equality need to be extended to all;
- We will not be involved in starting or provoking trouble, or escalating tensions;
- We all have a responsibility to make others feel safe;
- We all have a responsibility to create safer communities and opportunities for cross community interactions;
- A line needs to be drawn under recent (interface violence related) events;
- We as a community acknowledge that talking heals division and builds trust.

6. Case Study Findings

6.1 Findings from Focus Groups:

Between May 14th and June 10th 2008 a series of four Focus Group discussions were held, two in White City Community Centre and two in Greencastle CEP office. The composition of these focus groups was as follows:

Focus group	Male	Female	P	RC	age 16	age 17	age 18	age 19	In work/training	Not in work/training	Still at School
W City # 1 (7 persons)	7	0	7	0	3	3	1	0	2	3	2
CEP #1 (6 persons)	6	0	0	6	2	3	1	0	2	3	1
W City # 2 (8 persons)	2	6	8	0	2	3	2	1	2	3	3
CEP # 2 (7 persons)	7	0	0	7	4	2	1	0	1	4	2
Totals 28 persons	22	6	15	13	11	11	5	1	7	13	8

The focus groups were structured around the following five questions:

1. What was happening at the interface last year, before the start of this process?
2. What were your experiences and learnings in this process?
3. What are your views of the 'other' community and the politics of the recent conflict?
4. What has changed within and between the communities, got better or worse in the last year?
5. What do you think / hope your community / community relations will be like in two years time?

Question 1: What was happening at the interface last year, before the start of this process?

All the participants, in all of the focus groups, had much to say in response to this question. All recounted, in stark and direct terms, their own accounts of violent incidents and wrongs both inflicted on, and visited by, the 'other' community. Unsurprisingly, the responses were shaped by who (in terms of which community) in any given situation was perceived as perpetrator or victim. Furthermore, while for many of these young people, interface violence is simply '*good craic*' when they feel they hold dominance, they uniformly, seemingly oblivious to the contradiction, see such violence as grievously unjust when the shoe is on the other foot.

There was never fuck all to do, causing trouble and messing about at interface was all there was. Mates would text and say, 'come on and riot; you are a fag, just do it'. (catholic male)

Rioting was fucking great, cops, chasing them ones, going mad. Adrenalin, that is the best drug out. (catholic male)

During bad riots somebody will get caught in a chase and hurt bad. Mostly though no one really tries to catch one, more of a chase than anything. (protestant male)

Telling examples of such contradictions appeared when respondents spoke about issues relating to restricted access. For White City protestants this meant access onto the Whitewell Road and for Whitewell catholics, access onto the Shore Road. Also evident in these responses were attempts to justify denying a section of the community, i.e. White City protestants, access to *their road* i.e. the Whitewell Road, on the grounds that Whitewell catholics have similar access restrictions in relation to the (predominantly protestant) Shore Road. This practice (further examined in the discussion section), takes the form of hierarchical retaliation, where a community with access and safe passage restrictions vents its territorial frustration on smaller clusters, geographically separate to but sharing the same political / religious background as their original aggressors. The viciousness and fear that characterise the issue of access was also highly evident in the responses.

It was fucking mad; you could not get to the shop without your mum or dad, because those wee lads who hung around the Spar would not think twice about hitting a wee girl. (protestant female)

You are walking up to the shop, and out of house windows, or out of car windows, people are shouting 'orange bastards' or 'get back into your estate', or threats like, 'you have two seconds to get out of here'. This was every day in life. Its not their shops, we have no other shops to go to. We have been brought up all our lives to get used to not being able to get on the Whitewell (Road), it was just normal. (protestant female)

So the prods in White City can't get on to the Whitewell Road, boo fucking boo. We can't set foot on the whole of the Shore Road. That's here, right into town. (catholic male)

You can't go into town, into Glengormley or even onto the Shore Road. The prods in White City and Graymount are alright. They can get anywhere from up the back, the Antrim road. That's neutral, not like that Shore Road. (catholic male)

If one guy walked out of White City, and there was a bunch of us, we would get into him 'cause if we walked down the Shore Road... so why wouldn't we get into them on our road? (catholic male)

Worst thing for me was when I was 'biking' it up to the Spar to get electric card. Three wee lads chased me, started throwing bricks. One of the bricks hit me on the ankle, cut and bleeding and all. Got home told my mum, my dad says 'come on'. We looked for them in his car, we didn't find them. (protestant female)

Although the issue of access was central to the grievances aired at the focus groups, especially amongst the White City participants, it was in the recounting of attacks on the supposed sanctuary of home or estate that participants recounted their most harrowing tales. (It should be noted here that very similar and equally distressing accounts of attacks on Catholic homes, in respect of the Throne residents, are detailed in the interview section) All these accounts serve to illustrate the desperate situation facing these interface residents at a time when, in the more affluent parts of Belfast, other human souls were enjoying relative peace.

Worst thing for me was when they threw that many bricks on the roof in my gran's house that the slates all broke. But that wasn't all; they knew what they were doing, because when all the slates were busted up and holes and all were in the roof, then they threw petrol bombs and set the roof on fire. (protestant female)

My wee sister there (pointing to one of the other girls) got counselling. There used to be this horn or siren, remember, that went off when White City was getting attacked by taigs. When you heard that sound, remember that mad sound? Then you knew something was going to happen, somebody was maybe going to be hurt. You get used to it, oh fuck the window is in again, big deal. (protestant female)

There was one view that engendered widespread agreement amongst all the participants: that the conflict at this interface was spiralling out of control. As previously stated, the worsening and predominantly youth-led violence was seriously undermining hitherto promising cross community engagement and the collaborative management of interface conflict, mobile phone networks, and participation by local groups in North Belfast wide interface forums. The young people participating in these focus group discussions admitted being aware of such developments but all (male participants) agreed they felt unable to break what had become a retaliatory cycle, where the last attack justified the next. All the participants recalled the emergence of knives and other weapons and all claimed to be conscious of the general feeling that *'we were sliding into a real fucking mess.'* (catholic male)

Row started at school, ended up this guy only 16 got stabbed by taigs in Serpentine Road, that was it, no more rioting after that. You ones (community workers) and the UDA told us to stay away from interfaces. (protestant male)

Question 2: Tell me about your experiences in this process.

In general the participants gave positive (but short, almost scant) responses to questions specifically about the exercises in events 1 & 3, the identification of issues, visions and steps, the compiling of a community charter etc. The general view was that it was a necessary part of the process, but not particularly enjoyable. All the participants agreed that a) it was a useful exercise to identify and document the issues, visions, and necessary steps pertaining to their own community, b) they were surprised at the levels of similarity between the (two communities') individual documents, and c) that as a result of a) and b), they felt that there *was maybe the start* of a new found *common bond* between the two groups.

That was the working part, the boring part. It was alright, but we were there to sort things out and move on to the good part, you know, stopping all the shit and doing stuff with the Catholics. (protestant female)

What surprised us was that they came up with near the same stuff, near word for word. (catholic male)

The three main things the focus group participants were keen to discuss were a) Event 2 (paintballing), b) socialising for the first time with members of the 'other' community, and c) the reaction they received from within their own community to these engagements. All the

participants, in each of the focus groups, claimed that they found the experience of engaging with members of the 'other' community very worthwhile. While some participants admitted being *uncertain and apprehensive* at the start of the process, when pressed on the subject these young people stated that their fears were based on what the reaction of older members of their own community would be.

Did not like them prods getting our names and faces, but paint balling was brilliant, but our ones were yapping at us when we got back to our estate. Older ones, ones from the bar saying, 'what you doing with them snouts or prods', and stuff like that. (catholic male)

'Don't be bringing them into our estate', they would say shit like 'White City lovers', but they were just jealous 'cause we had got somewhere. (catholic male)

After the project started, we started meeting taigs and taig wee girls on the road at night, dead on so it was. We got to find out about them, and they got to find out about us. We used to think that 'cause there is more of them, we were more feared of them, but no, they are just as feared. But later on, older ones in White City challenged us, 'you are fenian loving bastards'. (protestant male)

We got on brilliant at paint-balling. We all just mixed well and swapped mobile numbers and MSN addresses. (protestant female)

Question 3: What is your view on the 'other' community and the politics of the recent conflict?

Within each of the four focus group discussions, the consistent initial response to this question was for the young people to recall the deaths of Thomas McDonald, Gerard Lawlor and Daniel McGolgan. These very local tragedies, all post Good Friday Agreement, seemed to define, certainly amongst the young, both the 'other' community and the conflict that has surrounded and shaped their worlds. The history and politics of the conflict past appear to mean little to these young people. All questions relating to wider political and historical issues were met with sighs of utter disinterest.

Anyway it's all about memorial this, memorial that with them (Sinn Fein). Why would we want to know about a bunch of people who died years ago for? (catholic male)

Who cares about what happened in history, none of us gives a fuck. It's our lives now is what we are interested in, too much fucking history in this country anyway. (protestant male)

Whilst there would appear to be little interest in wider political contexts, local issues and local events matter greatly; the more local, the more they seem to matter. Unsurprisingly, each participant seemed incapable of displaying empathy with regards to the 'other' community's sense of victimhood. Previous goading and taunting each other over who *got what was coming to them* and the desecration of memorials has, in the eyes of the participants, piled grievance upon grievance.

Graymount ones? We don't like them, one got stabbed, yeah he was just walking home, aye right. He was rioting. Gerald Lawlor, shot at Whitewell Road, and Danny McGolgan, shot in Rathcoole, they two were

innocent. Never going to talk to them Graymount ones, too much shit has happened. (catholic male)

After her big brother died everyone was really scared, because if they would do it once, they would do it again. Then every day the taigs would slabber about him (Thomas McDonald), it kills us every time they mention it. (protestant female)

Within the two focus groups of catholic youths, the general view on the White City protestants was that they were *ok people* and that if it was not for the discouraging influence of older members of their own community, *you know, ones from the bar*, there could be more cross-community interaction. The consensus amongst the catholic youths in respect of the protestants from Graymount was that a *whole lot* more preparatory work needed to be done prior to engagement.

Older ones tell us to stay away from the prods and say things like 'we never would have talked to them out of White City' and we are like, 'aye dead on.' They would not say it if they got to meet the prods, 'cause some of them are alright. (catholic male)

For the catholic youths 'politics' on a local level meant being *tortured* by either the PSNI, whom they view as partial to the unionist community, or by Sinn Fein, who they claim view any congregation of youths as anti-social.

The cops, they stop and ask us questions for nothing, say what they like to us, slabbers. They talk away to the snouts alright, but torture us, know, winding up like? (catholic male)

Know what Sinn Fein done on us? One night pissing rain, we were just hanging around in bus stop, having a smoke, about what seven of us. Here they are to us, 'come on move on.' So we all had to move it and get soaked. Eh, what do you think of that there then? (catholic male)

Feelings of being hemmed in, isolated, bullied, and outnumbered characterised the general view of White City protestant youths towards their Whitewell Road Catholic counterparts. 'Local politics' is seen as meaning the PSNI and the UDA, with the general view being indifference to both.

There is always more taigs on the Whitewell Road and they are usually older. We always feel outnumbered. They always threaten us too. Taigs are on Bebo saying what they are going to do to us. We reply, 'wise up.' (protestant male)

The cops and the UDA stop us rioting, and take our drink off us. Apart from that, they don't bother us and we don't bother about them. (protestant male)

Another topic raised in this section of the focus group discussions was the subject of drugs. Several of the protestant youths said that they regularly buy and smoke 'blow' (marijuana). Similarly, the catholic youths said that drug taking was common amongst their group. They were also keen to inform that they *took far more* than their protestant counterparts.

Know what you don't know mate? Drugs connect people, and keep things quiet. Because you get together after texting, do a bit of dealing and have a smoke and everyone is cool with each other. Not going to be any rioting then, is there? (protestant male)

Yeah, we do blow. But see our age group, say 30 of us, well out of that 30, over 20 take bumbles ('E' tabs) every week, and blow most nights. Them White City ones would never take E's, they don't even barely drink, and take very little blow, the UDA will not let them. (catholic male)

Question 4: What has changed within and between the communities, got better or worse in the last year?

The general view, certainly amongst White City participants, was that while there have been significant improvements in youth relations between White City and Whitewell, there has been little progress in attaining safe access onto the Whitewell Road. In addition, the consensus in respect of youth relationships between White City and Longlands was that the *situation is worse than before*. It was however very evident through these anecdotal accounts that there was a marked increase in the levels of communication and social contact between the White City and Whitewell youths. There was also evidence of an emerging theme, that there is a sense of commonality between both groups in terms of relating to members of the same age group, and an equal sense of disconnection and ambivalence from and towards those both older and younger. (This theme is further explored in question 5 and in the discussion section in part 7)

We are quite friendly with some wee girls our own age, beginning to make friends with them now. The wee fellas from the Whitewell Road are quite friendly too, no slabbering now, just chat on MSN. We would walk wee lads from Whitewell Road home now to make sure they are safe. (protestant female)

It is a wee bit safer now, but walking onto the Whitewell Road? No, not unless there are a few of you. (protestant female)

Since we started all this, there has been no more rioting with the Whitewell ones. It is still bad with them Longlands ones, worse even, but a lot better with the Whitewell ones. (protestant male)

Remember that Spar shop, where I got bricked at? Well it is still bad. When I go for electric card, you still get shit, only this time it is ten year olds. (protestant female)

Amongst the catholic youths there was a similar sense of living in a slightly safer environment. They too acknowledged that relations between the two communities had improved greatly. For them however, the influences within their own community, discouraging such interaction, remain. They spoke candidly about beating up protestants from White City for the sole reason that not to do so would incur the wrath of older members of their community. This for them appears to be a major obstacle in furthering, or even remaining involved in, cross community interactions. There was also a general sense that while things have got better for the *White City ones*, their own lot in respect of access to the Shore Road was unchanged. This denial of safe passage is both a major frustration and a source of resentment for these youths. With somewhat milder resentment they lamented on times past when contentious parades provided opportunities for good craic and youth diversionary trips.

Before if someone came out of White City onto the Whitewell Road, sometimes, most times, we would get into them, 'cause if you did not hit them, our ones, especially older ones would say 'what are you doing letting them snouts onto the road for.' But if there was just you and your mate and no one else saw nothing, you might just let the guy go. Now it is different, since all this doing stuff together, we would let them go, but we would not protect them if any of our ones wanted to attack them. (catholic male)

If two boys came out of White City, and we knew them, we would leave them. But if we did not know them, we would not leave them. (catholic male)

That Shore Road? We would get murdered, so getting into the town is a bollocks. Then even in the town (Belfast city centre) you are not safe, getting called taig bastards and all, but least if anything happens in town, there are cops there to stop it. (catholic male)

We used to only get trips when there was an Orange walk on, fuck all any other time, it was just to get us out of the way. Don't know if it's a good thing, but the marches on the Whitewell Road, orange and republican, are shit now, no rioting, no craic, no followers. What is the point? They are just boring. (catholic male)

Question 5: What do you think / hope community relations will be like in two years time?

The responses from all the focus groups in relation to question about their hopes for the future were characterised by a strange, almost schizophrenic mixture of pessimism and optimism. These catholic and protestant youths see the wider conflict ending, yet hold little hope that issues relating to restricted access will improve any time soon, and blamed the older and younger generations for this gloomy forecast.

I can't see us being able to walk down the Whitewell ever. (protestant male)

We will never be able to walk down the Shore Road, fucking never. (catholic male)

Older ones are more bitter, 'cause they maybe knew ones killed and all, so prods will never be allowed into parties or anything, definitely never in Longlands. (catholic male)

It is getting worse among the young ones, know twelve's and thirteen's, they are well up for it, we can't be bothered anymore. Fuck all that other shit, it is a waste of time now, people just need to get on. (catholic male)

Maybe soon, hopefully things will get better and my boy who is a catholic can get in here. But, some men and women in White City don't agree with us mixing with catholics. They need to wise up, we want a better future. They've had their lives; they should let us live our lives. (protestant female)

Other key issues discussed included the need to involve members of the Longlands community in youth engagement processes, and the hindrance to progress caused by (in many cases older) people from within the participants own estates, who were and remain opposed to cross community

engagement. Nearly all the participants spoke of the need for such processes to take place away from the local area. The uniform view from all of the focus group discussions was that it was much more difficult to relax and feel comfortable mixing with young members of the 'other' community within the confines of the local area. Some went as far as saying that as a result of the reaction they received following their initial exchanges, they would only take part in any future cross community interactions *away from our ones, or right out the way*.

We need more opportunities to come together, but you need to get us all away from the area, we get yapped at and shit from our ones here. We have got to live here. It is not worth it. (catholic male)

We need to get away with them (Longlands youths), *out of here, away to fuck* (protestant male)

It was also clear that, amongst some of the participants at least, the success of the initial exchanges between White City and Whitewell was marginally improving their confidence in themselves, in their communities, and in their own ability to carve out an adult future far happier than their childhood past.

It could get better, but I can't see it getting better with them Longlands ones. It's always going to be bad with them ones, but we said that about Whitewell Road ones too, and we was wrong there. (protestant male)

It is going to take time, its going to take years to fix this. But all us ones want things to get better, aye, better for everybody. (catholic male)

Well, we should definitely get a shop in White City, we definitely need a shop, and we deserve one too. We should also be letting catholics come in. They should be able to come in and not have to run if someone comes. Then, when we have all got all that, then they could take that peace fence down. (protestant female)

6.2 Findings from interviews with community workers and political representatives:

Between April 18th and June 27th 2008 a series of one to one interviews were conducted with:

- 3 voluntary interface / community workers from White City;
- 1 community worker from Whitewell;
- 1 youth worker from Whitewell;
- 2 local councillors (both Sinn Fein);
- 1 PSNI Chief Inspector (Area Commander) 'A' District, North Belfast;

These interviews were framed round the three main themes of:

- Historical contexts of local area and background to inter-community engagement.
- Impact of inter-community engagement and the project.
- Hopes and fears for future of local communities.

To enable examination of perspectives from within both communities, responses given to the above themes have been formatted into groups as per community background. Therefore, section 6.2.1

outlines the unionist community's experiences through the interviews with the three interface workers from White City. In section 6.2.2 the views from within the nationalist community are set out through the responses of the youth worker and community worker from Whitewell and the two local Sinn Féin councillors. Section 6.2.3 contains a summary of the interview with the PSNI area commander.

6.2.1 Interviews with three Interface Workers from White City:

Context and Background:

It was like a war zone, like something you would see on the TV, flames and land-rovers everywhere.
(interface worker)

The interviews began by asking each of the interface workers to explain what was happening in terms of interface conflict between White City and the neighbouring nationalist communities, prior to spring 2007 and the initiation of the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project. As with the younger members of the White City community, these residents / interface workers had no shortage of issues to air. Consistent amongst their responses was a sense of besiegement, both in personal and community contexts.

All respondents stated that they had felt under *tremendous pressure* and that this pressure had seemed to be *coming at them from all directions*. Firstly, they had to carry out their duties as voluntary, unpaid, full-time, 'night-shift' interface workers in a very dangerous (in terms of personal safety) environment. Secondly, they had to withstand criticism and opposition from within their own community for even attempting to engage with the 'other' community. Thirdly, they felt that their community was under constant sectarian attack from the much larger nationalist community. They spoke of their frustration at such sectarianism going unreported while media portrayals of incidents such as those associated with the Holy Cross conflict / dispute painted a picture of sectarianism emanating only from within the protestant community. Further in tune with their younger fellow residents, the same names, places, and issues central to the conflict, which for them was far from over, were raised time and again.

When Thomas McDonald got killed the place went mad. That is the strange thing, prior to the ceasefires and the Good Friday Agreement, there was no interface violence and prods had access to the Whitewell Road. All areas were open. Seems to me that after that we got organised rioting, organised by those in the other community who were opposed to the Good Friday Agreement, who were out of step with the rest, who were anti police republicans. (interface worker)

The deaths of Thomas McDonald and the two catholic boys, Daniel McGolgan and Gerard Lawlor, were senseless killings which fucked up everything on the Whitewell Road for years. (interface worker)

Ballygolan Primary School, so I am walking the child down, child by the hand, getting all sorts of abuse and threats, about the time of Holy Cross, no difference really. But we did not want to make a meal of it, no press or anything, not just me, any protestant. We just moved the children to Hazelwood integrated primary school. It's a safer walk to school. (interface worker)

Some interesting points were raised here in relation to the apparently far less violent situation and fewer restrictions in terms of access onto Whitewell Road prior to the Good Friday Agreement (these are further examined in the discussion section). It was also confirmed that high levels of inter-community violence continued up until the commencement of the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project in spring 2007. The interface workers, concurring with local youths from both sides of the divide, similarly viewed the emergence and use of knives as a defining time for the youths of both communities.

This violence at the Whitewell interfaces all started here around 1996, 1997, and right up until 2007 we have had intense trouble. (interface worker)

It used to be the situation here that we were continually expecting trouble; we had interface violence here every night. Right up until the two young boys, both sixteen I think, were stabbed last year. I think these incidents made everyone draw back. There was a real fear of what could happen. (interface worker)

Impact of Project:

In response to questions about the impact of the project, the interface workers began by recounting their initial *serious reservations* about the process at the beginning of the project. These initial doubts were followed by an acknowledgement of the difference that was made through their engagement with the (Two Parks Project) recently installed co-ordinator. The interface workers then gave an account of what happened at the interface on the night of the first event. These developments represented the emergence of a *new problem*: the lack of a safe shared space (this is further examined in the discussion section).

From the start I had serious doubts; I did not think this could work. The other side seemed to have lost a bit of control of their side of the interfaces. Liam and Paul did a brilliant job and Sean's project came and made 100% difference. There was movement, progress, almost straight away. (interface worker)

All the events went really well, despite the doubts that we all had. After the first night (event one) we gets this call off the peelers, two groups are gathering at interface. Well we got down there and all the kids, from both sides were just hanging around together, you know just talking and laughing. So we thought, right, we will just hang back, see what happens from a distance. Everything was cool so we let the cops know to stay away. Now you see we have created a new problem, but a better one than before, because now there is nowhere for the kids to hang about together, no safe space. No-one wants them hanging about at their doors, there are people still against this you know. (interface worker)

Between Whitewell Road and White City, there has been no rioting since the project started, not one bit of trouble. (interface worker)

Within this section of the interviews the interface workers expanded on the new and developing relationships between themselves and political representatives from the nationalist community. They were as appreciative of (though somewhat unnerved by) the *dependability* of Sinn Fein within the context of local interface issues, as they were disparaging of unionist (specifically DUP) politicians who they claimed for many years have shown little or no interest in their plight.

Gerard O'Reilly, a local Sinn Fein Councillor, brought stability to the process; he is always reliable, truthful, and gets things sorted for us. None of the other parties want to know. It is not easy for me to say this, but Sinn Fein grabbed this situation by the balls. (interface worker)

Our own politicians did not want to know. The Ulster Unionists, especially Fred Cobain, have helped a bit, advice and all, but the DUP don't want to know unless there is a TV camera around. Sinn Fein, I have got to say that in dealings with them, they have not done us any bad turns at all. (interface worker)

Nigel Dodds, seen him up here twice, both times talking to TV cameras, too busy him, too busy trying to get into Stormont. We are working with Sinn Fein to get speed bumps in White City; I think they will do it for us. What a situation eh? (interface worker)

Future Hopes and Fears:

The *worsening interface* violence with Longlands featured prominently in these responses. They also stated that they were having difficulty making contact with *influencers* from within that community to address this violence. They further expressed frustration that despite significant progress *at the bottom of the road* between White City and the Lower Whitewell, *just up the road* the nationalist community was unable / unwilling to prevent Longlands youths attacking White City. Another central concern of these interface workers remains the *safe passage* of their community onto the Whitewell Road.

The situation with Longlands has got worse. It's different down there; they don't seem to want to associate. (interface worker)

If prods were giving taigs the sort of abuse we get at the shops, wee women going for a loaf or milk and getting cursed at, we would stay out all night to make sure it did not happen, simple as that. They don't. (interface worker)

Abuse does not matter to anyone in White City now, they are well used to it, but physical violence is what people are scared of. They can call us what they want, we are not going anywhere. (interface worker)

Although the interface workers claimed that the siege mentality created by the attacks on White City engendered *community spirit*, there was also recognition that it had created new social problems both for them as individuals and for their community. Despite the improved situation, in looking to the future these interface workers seemed far more consumed with fears than hopes. Almost as an aside, they went on to hope that the progress that has been made could be built upon and that all the communities in Whitewell could begin to *enjoy the peace process*.

When the estate was getting attacked all the time, we were more together. We have got a life now but we don't know what to do with it. You get used to not socialising, not going out. (interface worker)

Now of course you have got a whole generation of boys, now aged 20 – 30 with criminal records for well basically defending the estate (White City). So they are saying 'now we can't get a job or nothing'. They all drink too much now, I know that. (interface worker)

We have made a good start here but we need to keep going. There is no reason why the young ones now should face the same shit. It is over. We need to make sure it stays over. (interface worker)

6.2.2 Interviews with community worker and youth worker from Whitewell and 2 local (Sinn Fein) councillors:

Context and Background:

From the perspective of the nationalist community, the context of the Whitewell area is centred on two periods, the deaths of the three young men in 2001 – 2002, and the *very difficult* times between 2005 and 2007. The interviewees also spoke of their frustration at not having any communication with representatives from White City or the wider unionist community during those dark days. To them, this absence of inter-community contacts clearly prevented *containment* of this violence. They further claimed that two other issues had come to characterise the area, intra-community fragmentation and the frequency of contentious parades.

In the past ten years Daniel McColgan, Gerard Lawlor and Thomas McDonald, kids really, were killed. There has been a lot of hurt; no other area has lost so many young people. (Sinn Fein councillor)

The Whitewell Road and Throne areas, specifically around 2005 - 2007 were very challenging. We had nightly attacks on the Throne estate; two very serious incidents involving setting alight of oil tanks which resulted in three families moving out. People were very traumatised by this; people lost their jobs as a result of anxiety and a six week old baby was evacuated after her house was damaged by fire. (Sinn Fein councillor)

2005 through to 2007 were very difficult and frustrating times. Some of this 'youth-led violence' was actually adult-led violence. We had no contact and no relationships with the local unionist community. (youth worker)

Catherine Court was attacked in August 2006, where it was claimed that a crowd of up to thirty, some armed with bricks and crossbows, attacked catholic homes. One factor that made this situation even more difficult to contain was that at this time there was no contact between the two communities. (community worker)

Nationalists from Lower and Upper Whitewell don't get on with each other, it is parochialism. It drives us cuckoo. (Sinn Fein councillor)

There is one republican march per year on the Whitewell Road and around ten loyalist marches; this does not make things easy. (Sinn Fein councillor)

Impact of Inter-Community Engagement

The establishing of contacts and relationships with White City interface workers has been a key development according to these interviewees. They credit these relationships along with the Whitewell mobile phone network (established in February 2006 and funded by IFI and CRC) with

containing interface situations as they arise. They went on to talk about the criticism they faced from their own community, who wanted to know why they were helping White City ones. They also recounted a breach of the agreement between the two sets of youths not to desecrate memorials, and how they set about making it right.

A window is broken. Two years ago with no communication, this would start rumours of paramilitary involvement on both sides. So fear and mistrust feed on this vacuum. Now some incident happens and we get in touch with the White City workers, or them with us to say look there has been this incident what can we all do to maintain calm and reassure our communities. (Sinn Fein councillor)

In late 2007 and early 2008 we had recurring problems on the Serpentine Road. We contacted Charlie straight away. Rumours were quickly dispelled and we were able to defuse tensions. (community worker)

In relation to working with the White City community, we have had to answer criticism from within our own community such as 'what are you doing working with them'. Our response is always that they are working class people and that it is about equality. (Sinn Fein councillor)

A month or so back we were contacted by the White City workers to say that a Rangers top had been removed from the small memorial to Thomas McDonald on the Whitewell Road. We chased this up for them; we understood the importance of this. We recovered the top and returned it. We let our youths know that this was totally unacceptable, this wee lad was killed. (community worker)

The interviewees then gave an account of a collaborative and ultimately successful campaign between both communities to save a local Post Office. Less encouraging, and in similar vein to their White City neighbours, the central contemporary local issues remain: ongoing problems with Longlands and the mobility restrictions in relation to the Whitewell and Shore Roads.

On the question of access onto the Whitewell Road, everybody should be able to use all services. The Post Office at Throne was under threat of closure. We, the White City and Whitewell communities, got it saved. The Post Office listened. This is shared space, this is unique. (Sinn Fein councillor)

People of the Lower Whitewell also have access issues. The closure of the Ballygolan library means that these residents have to use the Grove library on the Shore Road. People from the lower Whitewell don't feel safe, I am sorry to say that we are not in that situation yet. (Sinn Fein councillor)

Longlands, it is in Newtownabbey Council, which presents more of a challenge. Youth provision is chronically under resourced. So you have this mix of disaffection, anger, sectarianism as a legacy of the conflict and boredom. This is the stuff that fuels interface violence. Some young people live for it. BEBO is used to orchestrate interface gatherings. They thrive on it. (youth worker)

Longlands is a big worry for Sinn Fein, we are not happy with the situation. We are trying to establish engagement processes with local youths. We have a situation here where we have very weak community infrastructure, there is no provision for youth work, nothing at all. There are local youth clubs, but the

ones who appear to be causing trouble at the interfaces are barred from these clubs, and they do not feel part of the community. (Sinn Fein councillor)

Future Hopes and Fears:

The fears for the future as expressed by these nationalist interviewees were centred on *endemic* underage drinking and drug use in the Whitewell area. They further warned that only pro-active responses would provide effective solutions to these issues and wider interface conflicts. The interviewees claimed that sectarianism was *not the sole motivation* for inter-community violence, and complained about the lack of contribution of the DUP in addressing such division. While they acknowledged the problem of *older ones* dissuading the young participants from engaging with the 'other' community, they were more concerned with ensuring that the younger generation do not succumb to the same prejudices.

What we have here is a drink and drugs epidemic. The working class communities are getting hit the hardest. Smoking marijuana and the taking of cocaine and ecstasy is rife in our communities. You really see it; we see it all the time. We see known drug dealers selling to the youths. To tackle this we believe a multi-agency approach is needed. Politicians, community workers, the statutory agencies and the PSNI need to collectively address this epidemic. (Sinn Fein councillor)

Why vote for them (DUP) if they do not deliver? Our constituencies would not stand for it; there is an expectation within the nationalist community that political representatives deliver. They do not seem to want to know if any ex-combatants are involved. This I feel slightly removes them from the working class of these areas. (Sinn Fein councillor)

When the Orange hall, St Ninnians (both Whitewell Road) or White City are attacked we consistently condemn such attacks in the press etc. and seek to get those involved to desist. Condemnation on its own is not enough. Unionist politicians do not pro-actively show leadership. (Sinn Fein councillor)

The same people who attack St Ninnians also destroy things in their own area; their motivation is not entirely sectarian. (community worker)

It is a worry that the older ones discourage interaction. Yes it may have been hot and heavy when the older ones were growing up, but the younger ones are moving on. Our young people are savvy enough to say 'let us lead our own lives.' A discussion is needed with the older ones, but my emphasis would be on the younger ones who would take their place. (Sinn Fein councillor)

In slightly more optimistic tones than their White City neighbours, these interviewees were hopeful that the progress made could be maintained. They identified the two local integrated schools as potential assets in the creation of a shared community. They argued that targeted resources, specifically in the field of youth provision, and the creation of shared space in the Whitewell area were essential to ensure stable communities. Finally, they warned of the dangers of *taking our eyes off the ball*.

We have got two integrated schools on the Whitewell Road and we need to work more closely with them. The good work that goes on in these schools could be applied to the outside community. (community worker)

We have got to continue to engage. I would love to see the day when White City and the Whitewell Road are not seen as Protestant or Catholic, and where they come together and work to increase provision and share space. (Sinn Fein councillor)

We need to take a long term view of interface fences, but it will require resources. At the moment we have far too many kids milling about interface areas. (youth worker)

I fear if we don't give this due attention, we could go backwards. No-one wants that. We should all be concerned with creating safe and stable communities. (Sinn Fein councillor)

6.2.3 Summary of Interview with Muir Clarke PSNI (Area Commander) (see Appendix for full transcript).

Context and Background:

The Area Commander (PSNI AC) acknowledged that for many years the Whitewell area had experienced *very serious* inter-community violence. However, he also noted that recent engagement between these communities had brought about a marked reduction in such incidents.

The Lower Whitewell / Graymount, and the White City / Serpentine areas have long been flashpoints; we have seen some very serious trouble there over the years. These areas have improved over the past two years, most notably over the past one year. This I feel is down to community workers on both sides and improved communications.

What we have seen now is that there has not been a concerted attack on the Throne estate since early to mid 2006, also that the Orange Hall on the Whitewell Road has not been attacked since 2006. These are important; these are significant markers in terms of moving away from inter-community conflict.

Bluntly, what we had here, happening simultaneously, was voluntary interface community workers in White City taking responsibility with respect to their obligations, and nationalist interface workers taking similar responsibility for theirs.

Current Issues:

Inter-Community Violence:

The PSNI AC identified weak *infrastructure* and a sense of *detachment* from their neighbouring communities as factors which have contributed towards the problems associated with Longlands. In the wider context he further acknowledged the role of *persons who have standing, who are respected* within these areas in demonstrating their willingness to engage with members of the 'other' community. This *visible* demonstration of *community leadership*, he contended, would *address sectarianism* by encouraging young people to likewise engage.

I think the problem with Longlands is the weaker community infrastructure. They do not seem to have anyone to engage with. The Longlands estate is basically an 'island' cut off by the motorway. I feel this detachment, this isolation is a factor.

To address sectarianism I would like to see community workers, both loyalist and republican say to kids "look I knew Jimmy Blogs; he was my friend, killed by loyalists, by republicans, by police. Now we talk to them, we are over that, we work with them. If this message comes from persons who have standing, who are respected, that is community leadership.

Underage Drinking and Drug Use:

The PSNI AC said he felt underage drinking in the area was *endemic* and that the scale of the problem was *unbelievable*. He saw this misuse of alcohol by the young in the Whitewell area and beyond as a *major social problem*. A second *serious concern* was the routine use of cannabis, especially amongst the young, and their lack of knowledge or concern of the consequences of such use.

Well I am afraid to say that I feel we have endemic, widespread underage drinking. I would be very concerned about this. Every weekend we take drink, 'carry outs' from 12 – 17 year olds; it is not about criminalising these young people; we do not set out to charge them or haul them up before the courts; it is however about accepting that we have a major social problem here.

The scale is unbelievable. In North Belfast as a whole we would confiscate hundreds of bottles every single weekend; even in the Whitewell area you are talking about several confiscations most weekends. This is a cause of great concern.

Alcohol is a dis-inhibitor; it makes young people think they are invincible. It makes them do things totally out of character, rowdy behaviour, underage sex, violent behaviour, bravado "there is a prod, there is a catholic, lets attack them". I would also be very concerned that this level of underage drinking is pushing these young people towards drug use.

Alcohol in these circumstances is a gateway to drugs. I am very worried about the level of drug use. These kids think that it is safe to smoke 'blow; it is not. It will seriously mess their heads up. This will lead to long term and life long psychological problems. This is a big deal.

Youth Engagement and the 'Triple Track Approach':

The PSNI AC noted the importance of youth engagement in addressing the problems faced by the Whitewell communities. He reported on the progress in relation to PSNI attempts to engage with White City and Graymount youths and the present limitations on the police having a similar process of engagement with youths from nationalist Whitewell. On the wider issues of youth disaffection he made two central points:

1. A triple-track approach needs to be adopted that engages with the *three youth generations* at the same time. Working only with the problem *secondary* generation of teenagers who are negatively influenced by an older *third* generation, and eventually replaced by the younger *primary* generation won't make the problem (be it sectarian or anti-social) go away.

2. Communities and wider society need to put in place and manage *early detection systems in relation to problem children*. This is required to avoid *social issues* becoming *intractable problems*.

It is all about how I engage with both sets of kids, separately first. I need to know what they want to do, is it to drink and riot? What is going to take to divert their attention?

We have begun to engage with young people from White City in the 13 – 19 year age group. This has not happened yet in the Roman Catholic community. We have been told by community reps that the kids are not ready yet. I hope and expect things to change in the near future.

I feel that what is required is a process which encompasses all three stages of youth development: the primary generation (aged 5 – 12), the secondary generation (aged 12 – 17), and the third generation (aged 18 – mid 20s). All these age brackets need to be worked on in a triple-track approach. If you concentrate only on the second generation, in effect the problem generation, the younger generation will simply take their place. Equally you cannot ignore the older generation, for it is this group who hold influence over the younger group; these are the role models, this is the source of peer pressure.

Why is it that if John or Jane are way off track at primary age, and people are saying “they are going to get into trouble”, then when the kids are 12 or 13, go “I told you so, didn’t I tell you”. Why do we do that? Why do we let that happen? Why don’t we intervene? Why does it have to become a very real problem before someone fixes it? We need to address these social issues before they become intractable problems.

Future Hopes and Fears:

The PSNI AC stated that he was confident that the communication structures between communities and the PSNI could be further developed. He added that he hoped that the hitherto *ad hoc* style of communication and meetings with the White City interface workers could become more *regulated and formal*. He also suggested that general anti-social behaviour in the Whitewell area needed to be addressed in a *multi-agency community partnership*. In such structures the PSNI and other agencies would set about addressing a community’s needs as identified in *environmental audits*. He finished by acknowledging the progress of recent years and expressed his hope that positive change could be realised at the *micro level*.

The set up in relation to meeting with White City reps was, and to an extent still is, too ad hoc. We would like to work towards more regulated formal meetings, say bi-monthly, yes, say six per year, more perhaps around times of parades. I expect the PSNI to have a finger on the pulse, to know what the community’s immediate concerns are.

While the PSNI cannot ever be a panacea to every community’s every problem, there is a role for the police service within community partnership or forum structures. These partnerships would include the Housing Executive, the local council, social and statutory agencies, and the PSNI. So if a community says “We are getting tortured in Finlay Park with anti-social behaviour”, an environmental audit could be carried out. So, the outcomes of the audit might indicate that new lighting is required, and that intervention patrolling is required from the PSNI.

In such a structure everyone takes tasks away from meetings; at follow up meetings contributors will say “we got this done”, and then you look at the situation again and ask “What more do we need to do?”. This kind of approach can address issues like street drinking, or problems around certain bars, where we can bring the licensing bodies into the process.

It simply is not enough for a community to say “we need to address anti-social behaviour”; we need to be much more specific.

On the whole I am optimistic. If someone in 1992 had said that in 2008 this is what the future is going to look like, I would have laughed them off the planet. So that tells me that where there is a genuine desire for change, big things can happen. It is my belief that such a desire exists in Whitewell, and indeed beyond. The critical question is how we stimulate that continuous desire for change at the micro level.

7. Discussion:

Section 7.1 of this discussion section documents project-specific outcomes. Sections 7.2 – 7.4 examine three central issues to emerge from the report:

- The **historical traumas** experienced by the Whitewell communities and their effect on inter-community relations;
- The **internal influences** which discourage positive interaction and encourage hostility between interface communities;
- The **restricted mobility** of many Whitewell residents, caused and exacerbated by territoriality and hierarchical retaliation, the lack of shared space and the over simplistic equating of access with distance in the government's (NIMDM) measurement of proximity to services.

Section 7.5 examines social alienation and details some of the wider societal issues which are non specific to Northern Ireland in respect of a) urban youth disaffection, b) three brief examples of community 'disconnection' in the Whitewell area which impact on both intra and inter-community relations, and c) economic disconnection of areas such as Whitewell within the context of a 'twin speed city' (Murtagh 2008).

7.1 Did the Project meet its Objectives?

The four key objectives of the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project were to:

- Address the access restrictions encountered by both communities;
- Give participants the opportunity to identify the problems faced by their communities, and contribute to finding solutions;
- Bring an end to inter-community violence between the groups;
- Create relationships and structures between the youths of both communities to enable them to address future inter-community issues.

As is evident throughout this case study:

- The issue of safe access onto the Whitewell and Shore Roads remains unresolved and shows little signs of imminent progress.

In the remaining three key objectives of the project, however, significant progress has been made:

- Participants identified the problems faced by their communities and are contributing to finding solutions;
- Inter-community violence between the groups has dramatically reduced;
- Relationships and structures between the youths of both communities have developed to assist them in addressing future inter-community issues.

The outcomes of the project have exceeded all expectations and include significant improvements in the relationships between these two sets of youths. Serious problems remain for them and their communities, however. The issues of sporadic violence and mobility restrictions involving Longlands, White City, Whitewell Road and Shore Road are unresolved. Nonetheless, the

accomplishments of the young people from White City and the Lower Whitewell who participated in the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project cannot be overstated. What they achieved is all the more impressive given the obstacles they confront in daily life.

7.2 Historical Traumas:

The deaths of the three local young men have profoundly affected both communities. Their deaths and the manner of their deaths were tragedies for their families and disastrous for local inter-community relations. Constant sectarian taunting and the regular desecration of memorials have ensured that community wounds were never given the chance to heal. One of the earliest findings of the project was the depth of grievance which these taunts and desecrations engendered. These deaths and the disrespect shown to the dead and grieving by the 'other' community instilled within each 'wronged' community a profound sense of victimhood (Horowitz 1985).

Since the start of the project and following on from commitments given by the two sets of youths, no memorials have been damaged and the taunting has stopped. Furthermore, when an individual recently removed a Rangers football top from a memorial on the Whitewell Road, a Sinn Fein councillor and community activists from within the nationalist community persuaded local youths to locate and return the item. Whilst all agreed that it should not have been removed in the first place, the returning of the top was significant and symbolic.

Ten years of sporadic inter-community violence have created no shortage of historical traumas for both sections of the Whitewell community. In addition to the 3 deaths in 2001/2002 and two stabbings in 2007, this report recounts arson attacks, the *bricking* of school girls, sustained and often riotous attacks on communities, constant intimidation and a litany of assaults. That each community in Whitewell has experienced historical traumas at the hands of the other community is irrefutable, but many within the Whitewell area continue to see only themselves as victims and only their enemies as aggressors and perpetrators (Mack 1990 Cunningham, 1998).

This case study shows that much of the historical trauma experienced by these communities is due to the events of very recent years. While many other parts of Northern Ireland have enjoyed a decade of peace, these communities have endured traumas which have destabilised inter-community relations. Therefore, the ongoing and according to many accounts, worsening violence between Longlands and White City is very concerning, as is the perception reported by many Whitewell nationalists that they are neither welcome nor safe on the Shore Road.

7.3 Internal Influences:

Fear of Own Community:

The responses from the young people and adults in each community illustrate the forces that both encourage hostility and discourage positive interaction. This report shows that communities and individuals in Lower Whitewell and White City who seek to transcend sectarianism and violence routinely encounter internal opposition. 'Sectarianism is not merely a repressive relationship between communities but also within them' (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006 p. 174). This report further recounts sectarian forces within both communities impacting on the behaviours and fears of their 'own'.

- Gangs of youths have attacked lone ‘trespassers’ at least in part because not to do so would imperil them in their own community;
- Widespread apprehension at the start of the project was related to the reaction of the youths’ own communities;
- Young people and adults routinely receive criticism from ‘within’ for engaging with members of the ‘other’ community;
- Young participants pleadingly request that any further engagement with the ‘other’ is far away from their own community’s intimidating gaze.

Whilst it is disappointing that the young people had to endure these internal influences, these pressures did test the robustness of the process. A very important outcome of the project is that the process itself convinced participants to face down internal pressures – if the process wasn’t robust this would not have happened. The internal regulation of these contacts could easily have proved to be the most destructive. Any one of many internal influences could have derailed the process by doing little more than not encouraging participation. The process, which prioritised risk control as an ongoing element throughout, managed these various threats effectively (see section 5.1).

In their study of violence and community safety in North Belfast, Byrne et al (2005) identify the cyclical nature of such sectarianism. They found that ‘exposure to sectarianism’ frames the mindsets of young people to respond by choosing ‘yet deeper segregation’ (Byrne et al 2005). The accounts of the young people of White City and Lower Whitewell show that they are aware that the sectarianism that transmits around them seeks to imprint its prejudices upon them. The participation of these young people in this project is an acknowledgement and rejection of their role in this corrosive cycle.

Ideological Justification:

The sense of besiegement within both communities and the *endless* parades and commemorations in the Whitewell area have encouraged within both communities the ‘lionising of our side’ and the ‘demonization of the other side’ (Smyth and Scott 2000, Jarman 2002). The Whitewell area’s countless historical traumas have ensured a plentiful supply of candidates with which to lionise or demonise. This report evidences opinions in both communities which view ‘their’ past as nothing more than heroic resistance. Moreover, entire childhoods in the Whitewell area have been spent inheriting grievances and learning (sometimes only) about the wrongs that have been visited upon ‘kith and kin’ (Smyth and Scott 2000). It is also evident that overtly sectarian minorities from within both communities in Whitewell use these processes to seek ideological justification for their views, and for the right to impose these prejudices on their ‘own’ community (Horowitz 1985, Jarman 2002).

7.4 Restricted Mobility:

The Issue of Access:

Of all the many problems identified in this study as facing the communities of Whitewell, issues relating to restricted access and safe passage are the most pronounced. The central grievances of both communities were framed around their movement and choices being curtailed by fear of the

'other' community. As an enclave interface community, White City residents have for many years faced severe restrictions on their mobility. These restrictions are compounded by the absence of a shop, doctor's surgery, dentist, post office, post box, or public telephone in the White City estate. This report recounts serious intimidation and often violent attacks being used against White City residents to deny them safe access on to the Whitewell Road:

- Individual (young and adult) residents of White City have been threatened, verbally abused, including by *people shouting and cursing out of windows*, and attacked while attempting to go to, for example, the Spar shop on the Whitewell Road;
- Young people from White City have routinely faced similar treatment accessing the two local schools or the bus stops on the Whitewell Road.

For the residents and young people of Lower Whitewell, similar statements can be made about enclave existence and their access restrictions in relation to the *White City entrance* and the Shore Road.

- Many Lower Whitewell residents are fearful of passing the White City entrance and thus are, psychologically at least, restricted to the lower half of the Whitewell Road;
- The Shore Road (the only alternative route to the city centre) is deemed by many nationalist residents of the Lower Whitewell as not safe, either to enter or pass through.

A host of previous in-depth examinations of spatial movement and restricted access between interface communities show that a) such restrictions are common amongst such communities, and b) the threatening sections within both communities are a very small, albeit very loud, minority (Weeks 1992, Shirlow et al 2002, Byrne et al 2005). In this report, sectarian minorities in each camp punching well above their weight and the commonality of these issues in Whitewell and wider Northern Irish society, are seen to be linked to 'our benign solution' of managed ethnic residential segregation which panders only to the 'threatening sections' within both communities who crave 'yet further separation' (Byrne et al 2005, Shirlow & Murtagh 2006).

Territoriality and Hierarchical Retaliation:

'The differences between unionism / loyalism and nationalism / republicanism are perpetuated through the art of territoriality' (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006 p. 172).

In the absence of orchestrated / paramilitary conflict in Northern Ireland, the general feeling seems to be that the violence we now witness at the Whitewell and other interfaces is little more than recreational. Indeed, this report evidences manifestations of inter-community and interface violence in the Whitewell area which are no more than wanton anti-social behaviour with 'no political motivation or impetus' (Jarman 2006 p. 9). However, this report also shows that in the Whitewell area, and no doubt other areas, territoriality - the simple denying of access to the 'other' community - is in many cases a more apt way of describing what motivates and characterises much of the 'localised' inter-community conflict. It is the case that a great deal of general interface violence, certainly in the broad sweep of Belfast wide interfaces, is recreational and is a 'social activity, occurring out of boredom and bravado rather than having a political basis' (Jarman 2002 p. 29). However, the interface violence examined in this report certainly seems, in part at least, to have

a tribal / territorial motivation and basis. Given the power and pervasiveness of 'ethnic affiliations' in divided societies (Horowitz 1985), such territorial violence in the Whitewell area (and beyond) seems more than capable of creating and maintaining an impetus of its own.

The practice of hierarchical retaliation is within the context of interface communities a very corrosive social process. It applies in both communities and further perpetrates the 'egoism of victimisation' (Mack 1990 Cunningham, 1998). The nature and prevalence of political 'what-aboutery', an ingrained feature within the discourse of inter-community conflict in Northern Ireland, means that the root or source of this practice is never pinned down. If Protestants on the Shore Road use their grievances in relation to wider North Belfast community frictions to justify denying safe access / passage to Whitewell Catholics, this aggrieved 'minority' similarly uses these 'injustices' to justify denying access on to the Whitewell Road to White City protestants. This process is of course played out until the smallest cluster in the chain, up until 2007 the Throne estate, becomes the aggrieved minority. Every community in this chain perceives itself primarily as victim, but is in reality both victim and perpetrator of this inter-community bullying / hierarchical retaliation.

Lack of Shared Space:

Another key issue to emerge from the case study, linked to the subjects of access and territoriality, is the lack of shared space in the Whitewell area. Given the nature of territoriality, where the space 'just our side' of the interface is very much 'ours' and the lines of demarcation are clearly defined (be they between the White City and Whitewell Road or at Arthurs Bridge interfacing White City with Longlands), there has been little opportunity for the creation of shared spaces (Weeks 1992). In the light of the improved relationships this report evidences in respect of the White City and Lower Whitewell communities, this lack of shared space is preventing further progress. Youths from both communities who want to create and maintain social connections with the 'other' community have no safe space to interact (Allport 1987). There seems little point in community workers embarking on the often arduous process of initiating such connections if there is no safe physical space within which these fledgling relationships have the opportunity to develop. In the context of the wider 'adult' communities, the current restrictions on access to the Whitewell and Shore Roads translate similarly into a lack of safe, shared space for the daily accessing of provision and services, let alone for the development of new inter-community social connections.

Measurement of Access:

As shown in section 4.2, (NIMDM 2005) deprivation indices misleadingly equate distance with access. Ranking a community's level of deprivation in terms of proximity to services is rendered somewhat meaningless when the road accessing the service is as inaccessible as the Whitewell Road is to the residents of White City, or the Shore Road to the residents of Lower Whitewell. This 'proximity to services' measurement is based solely on the measurement of distance from home to service and takes no account of mobility restrictions or 'chill factors' relating to the 'other' community. The result is that anomalies or spikes appear in the indices which a) mask serious mobility disadvantage, and b) distort the overall picture of a community's true level of deprivation:

- The Valley ward, ranked as the 70th (out of 582) most deprived ward in Northern Ireland, is (under this flawed method of measurement) the 506th most deprived ward in terms of Proximity to Services;
- The Bellevue ward, ranked the 184th most deprived, is the 493rd most deprived in terms of Proximity to Services.

I.e. according to these official statistics neither ward has any difficulty in accessing services, which wholly contradicts the findings of this report.

Fear of working in, or consuming in, or transiting through the 'other' community has been proved to be a far more significant determinant than distance in affecting interface mobility (Shirlow et al 2002, Shirlow & Murtagh 2006). In an extensive study of (East Belfast) labour market and community segregation which examined the chill factors in relation to the spatial mobility of the Short Strand and Ballymacarret communities, Shirlow et al (2002) found that:

- Employment choices and consumption patterns amongst interface residents are shaped and severely limited by a) the location of workplace or service provision, if perceived as being in the 'other' community and b) the route to and from these workplaces and service provisions, if such journeys involve transiting through the 'other' community;
- The location of a workplace / service provision (i.e. in 'other' / unsafe community) is a more important factor in seeking employment / service provision than the 'frictional effects of distance' (Ibid).

7.5 Social Alienation:

Other issues raised in this Whitewell project such as anti-social behaviour, drug use, underage drinking and a growing knife culture are neither specific to Northern Ireland nor to interface communities (Morgan et al 2000). The problems associated with these issues, however, in areas such as Whitewell, compound and are compounded by the multiple disadvantage such interface communities already constantly face. Problems relating to urban youth disaffection are common in the Whitewell area. Key examples from the case study include:

- Accounts of **anti-social behaviour** in the forms of vandalism, street drinking, menacing congregations of youths, and recreational violence occurring regularly in the Whitewell area;
- The issue of **underage drinking** described by community workers, local politicians, and a senior PSNI officer as *widespread* and *endemic* and a *major social problem* requiring urgent multi-agency approaches. A 2005 Health Promotion Agency report analysed the drinking behaviour of young people in Northern Ireland between the ages of 11 and 16. The report claimed that "young people here start drinking as young as 11 and many young people are drinking to dangerous levels".
(<http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/Resources/alcohol/temperancereport.htm>)
- The heavy and persistent **use of drugs** by many young people in the Whitewell area, unaware of or undeterred by the social and personal consequences. In January 2008 the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety published a report which presented key findings from a two year survey on the prevalence of drug use in Northern Ireland. It found that between 2002/03 and 2006/07, lifetime use of any illegal drugs increased from 20% to 28% and 'last year

use' increased from 6% to 9%. The report further indicated prevalence rates for 'last year' and 'last month' use of illegal drugs were highest for the youngest age band (15-24 years). (<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-dhssps/news-dhssps-january-2008/news-dhssps-250108-drug-use-in.htm>)

- The recent emergence and **use of knives** in the Whitewell area in interface related violence, which can be seen as mirroring the growing knife culture in wider North Belfast. Recent PSNI statistics showed North Belfast as having the highest level of knife-related crime anywhere in Northern Ireland. (www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk) In the past five years over 5000 knife related crimes were recorded by the PSNI across Northern Ireland, 'over 600 of these crimes being reported in North Belfast' (<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/community-telegraph/north-belfast/news/north-belfast-is-knife-crime-capital-13919589.html>).

Social Disconnection:

This report evidences four examples of community 'disconnection' which are shown to be factors in perpetuating interface tensions in the Whitewell area:

- Generational 'disconnection' within the Whitewell communities a) between youths and adults (see Morgan et al 2000), and b) amongst the three youth generations;
- Economic 'disconnection' caused by poverty and lack of opportunities;
- Protestant 'disconnection' from their own politicians whom they view as *absent, and disinterested* in the problems faced by White City, which is seen to reinforce perceptions of isolation and abandonment;
- The 'disconnection' and *detachment* of the Longlands estate in relation to a) its neighbouring estates, and b) the communications structures that these estates have both created and benefitted from.

Economic Disconnection in a Twin Speed City:

This report evidences economic disconnection between the most deprived estates of the Whitewell area and the massive investment and regeneration of 'buoyant post-conflict economy' Belfast (Murtagh 2008). In 'New Spaces and Post Conflict Belfast', Murtagh (2008) warns of 'new forms of segregation which create deeper exclusions for those largely untouched by peace and economic modernity'.

This twin speed city narrative must be highlighted to prevent a) interface areas sliding down the funding agenda, and b) interface communities and their restricted mobility being ignored in relation to the proposed four new Major Employment Locations (MELS) (Ibid). As part of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (2015) (http://www.planningni.gov.uk/AreaPlans_Policy/Plans/BMA/draft_plan/00contents/00Contents.htm) the four sites of Lisburn West, Mallusk, Purdysburn and Titanic Quarter will 'dominate industrial zonings' (Murtagh 2008: p.2). This case study clearly demonstrates the restricted mobility of both sections of the community in Whitewell specifically in respect of the Whitewell and Shore Roads. It is therefore difficult to imagine how the four proposed Major Employment Locations can benefit these communities without a pro-active policy drive aimed at addressing mobility restrictions. Without such a policy drive interface communities such as Whitewell are bound to fall yet further behind economically.

'A twin speed city has emerged in the last decade in which those with the education and skills are doing well in key growth sectors whilst those without resources are increasingly corralled in the sink estates stratified by poverty, segregation and fear' (Ibid p.1)

Murtagh calls for a three stranded approach to address the consequences of this twin speed development and the growing differential between the haves and the have-nots (Ibid p.19 – 20):

- 'A new approach to understanding the role and modes of public transport to open opportunity for areas with the highest rates of transport poverty and segregation.'
- 'Connectivity relates to urban labour markets as well as spatial movement. Skills based interventions which are specifically aimed at interface areas and combine training with patient community development approaches need to be recognised.'
- The effects of conflict, specifically the 'legacy of segregation and exclusion' need to be put at the very heart of urban planning and regeneration.'

8. Conclusions:

Structure of the Conclusions

In this section we highlight the implications for policy, practice and future work in this area. The section is subdivided into 3 further sections:

- In the first section, 8.1, we summarise the key findings from the project and what their implications are for interface management and regeneration. This is especially the case in understanding the nature of interface problems in terms of the complex deprivation, denial of services and dysfunctional youth sub-cultures that create major obstacles to local development;
- We then make suggestions regarding practical actions that need to be taken over the next 12 months in the form of a *15 point suggested action plan*, in section 8.2. Here we draw specifically on the experiences of the Whitewell project to set out the activities that we feel should be supported in order to initiate a process of lasting regeneration; and
- Based on this, we finally highlight in section 8.3 the need for a dedicated interface strategy and for specific roles for key agencies and Departments with responsibilities in this area.

8.1 Lessons from the Project:

In this section we reflect on the experience of the project in terms the lessons for practice and interventions of this type. The initiative involved patient, high risk and incremental development of trust and reciprocation within and between young people to address their everyday concerns and experiences. Our concern is that the need for the distinctive practice developed here to be maintained, supported and developed where appropriate across contested areas in Northern Ireland cannot be over emphasised.

8.1.1 Impact of the Project

- a) The format of the project (see section 5.1) enabled an effective and positive engagement process between the two groups of youths which has led to a reduction in violence and the building of relationships and structures within which future inter-community issues can be addressed.
- b) Despite these advances, the issue of safe access onto the Whitewell and Shore Roads remains unresolved and shows little sign of imminent progress.
- c) There is a need and a willingness within both communities to further develop this project and the relationships between the young people of White City and the Lower Whitewell.
- d) The inclusion of the neighbouring estates of Longlands and Graymount will be required to expand the scope of the project and to build on the progress that has been made.

8.1.2 Interface Management and Youth Provision in the Whitewell Area:

- a) The work carried out for many years on a voluntary basis by the White City interface workers has been critical in containing and preventing inter-community violence, and needs to be supported to underpin conflict transformation work in the area.
- b) The Whitewell mobile phone network (funded by IFI and CRC) and the interface forum meetings have been significant factors in developing relationships and reducing inter-community violence.

- c) The Two Parks Project youth engagement process with the Lower Whitewell was the catalyst for their project interactions with the youths from White City, proving the value of designated and targeted youth provision.
- d) It has been commonly reported that many of the area's youth related problems cannot be addressed because of the chronic under-resourcing of youth provision within all the communities of Whitewell.

8.1.3 Historical Traumas:

- a) The deaths of the three young men and sustained inter-community violence in recent years have destabilised inter-community relations and have reinforced perceptions of victimisation and besiegement in both communities.
- b) Engagement between the two groups of youths, through which young people have developed recognition of shared victimhood and a commitment to respect the memory and memorials of those killed, has initiated a healing process.

8.1.4 Internal Influences:

- a) Overtly sectarian forces within both communities continue to encourage hostility and to discourage positive interaction between the Whitewell communities.
- b) These sectarian forces have been seen to have a definite impact on the behaviours and fears of members of their own community who are reluctantly 'sectarianised' in this process.

8.1.5 Restricted Mobility and the Lack of Shared Space:

- a) Restricted access and the denial of safe passage are pronounced challenges facing communities in the Whitewell area. The central grievances of each community are framed around their movement and choices being curtailed by fear of the 'other' community, specifically in relation to the denial of safe access onto the Whitewell and Shore Roads.
- b) Although recreational violence is evident, much of the interface conflict in the Whitewell area has a tribal / territorial motivation and basis.
- c) Communities in the Whitewell area with their own access and safe passage restrictions, vent their territorial frustrations on smaller clusters of the 'other' community, in a form of hierarchical retaliation i.e. Whitewell nationalists who are denied access on to the 'protestant' Shore Road, use this injustice to justify denying White City protestants access onto the Whitewell Road etc.
- d) The lack of shared space in the Whitewell area is preventing further progress. Youths from both communities who want to create and maintain social connections with the 'other' community have no safe space to interact. In the context of the wider adult communities, the current restrictions on access to the Whitewell and Shore Roads translate similarly into a dearth of safe, shared space for the daily accessing of facilities and services. Similarly, such restrictions prevent the development of new inter-community social connections.
- e) The two local integrated schools are viewed within both communities as neutral and valuable community assets in the pursuance of creating safe space in the Whitewell area.

8.1.6 Implications for Measuring Access and Equality:

- a) One of the issues highlighted by the research and the development of the programme of work is the way in which we both understand and measure access. In measuring 'proximity to services' the NIMDM deprivation indices misleadingly equate distance with access. This calculation based on the measurement of distance takes no account of denied access' or chill factors relating to the 'other' community. The result is that anomalies or spikes appear in the indices which a) mask serious mobility disadvantage, and b) distort the overall picture of a community's true level of deprivation.
- b) The denial of access is a denial of equality and the rights and entitlements expressed within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998). There is of course a wide span of 'levels of restrictions' which affect spatial mobility in relation to interface communities. This span ranges from a preferred avoidance of a street, shop, or mural etc. populated by, frequented by or supportive of, the 'other' community, to likely and actual assaults. When members of the gay community or individuals from ethnic minority communities are attacked for 'trespassing' in unwanted areas, such attacks are rightly condemned as hate crimes. Somewhere near the top end of the span of levels of restrictions faced by interface communities, these denials of access (certainly those involving actual assaults) veer into hate crime territory, and are thus central to claims of equality. Attention needs to be given to both ends of this span: at the extreme 'hard' end where criminal offences are committed in relation to denying access, i.e. assaults and violent intimidation, by acknowledging such behaviour as (i) motivated by hate and (ii) impinging on the equality of those thus denied access; at the 'softer', less extreme end of the span where no criminal offences are committed but where access is denied through factors which leave trespassers in no doubt that they are unwelcome i.e. sectarian graffiti, sustained development work is needed to actively promote tolerance and a respect for diversity. This of course requires a significant and long term undertaking, but if we as a society are serious about an equality agenda, we must ensure that the most deprived have access to and a share in the economic and social benefits of peace.

8.1.7 Social Alienation:

- a) The case study also highlights the link between living in an interface area and a whole host of socio-economic and lifestyle problems. These are accentuated for young people whose ability to articulate and meet their needs and have the lifestyles and opportunities commonly available in other areas are severely limited. The interplay between social deprivation, segregation and division makes areas such as Whitewell and young people in particular worthy of special attention. Underage drinking, the use of drugs and anti-social behaviour are particularly intense problems:
 - (i) The issue of underage drinking in the Whitewell area is described by community workers, local politicians, and a senior PSNI officer as *widespread* and *endemic*.
 - (ii) There is heavy and persistent use of drugs by many young people in the Whitewell area who seem unaware of or undeterred by the social and personal consequences.
 - (iii) Anti-social behaviour in the forms of vandalism, street drinking, *menacing* congregations of youths, and recreational violence occur regularly in the Whitewell area.
 - (iv) There is serious concern over the recent emergence and use of knives in the Whitewell

area in interface related violence which is seen as mirroring the growing knife culture in wider North Belfast.

- b) Youth engagement processes which work with only with the problem *secondary* generation of teenagers are undermined by a) the negative influence of the older *third* generation, and b) being eventually replaced by the younger *primary* generation who in general are not engaged with until they reach *secondary* age. This is what we mean by a comprehensive strategy to support the youth work in interface areas. We noted earlier that the intervention is high risk and one of the risks identified was the way in which active participation was influenced, sanctioned and at times regulated by the wider peer group. In forming and consolidating the project, facilitators and workers worked intensively to ensure that participation and commitment rates were maintained and that the wider project was not derailed by objectors. Working through skills of persuasion, anticipating threats and getting positive individuals on board helped to make the intervention distinctive and need to be supported in capacity building programmes.
- c) Ultimately, what characterises deprivation in the Whitewell area are intensive forms of social and physical disconnection, which we have shown to be factors in perpetuating interface tensions in the area. Interventions need to address these especially intense forms of exclusion:
 - (i) In the Whitewell area many people suffer the effects of economic disconnection caused by poverty and lack of opportunities. This disconnection is compounded by the multiple disadvantage already faced by interface communities.
 - (ii) There is a significant degree of disconnection between the Protestant community of the Whitewell and unionist politicians who are perceived as *absent and disinterested* in the problems faced by White City and Graymount. Therefore there is a void in political leadership and representation for these unionist communities.
 - (iii) Many of the inter-community and social problems involving the Longlands estate are due to the disconnection and *detachment* of the estate in relation to (a) its neighbouring estates, and (b) the communications structures that these estates have both created and benefited from.

8.2. Development Opportunities: A 15 point Suggested Programme for Short Term Action

In this section we draw on the experience of the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project to set out a series of specific recommendations for action, which we feel should be supported over the next 12 months.

8.2.1 The Youth Mediation Project:

1. Resources need to be made available to further develop the project by a) building on the progress and relationship between White City and the Lower Whitewell and b) expanding the scope of the project to include the Graymount and Longlands estates.
2. The format of the project is considered as a template and model of good practice in engaging with disaffected youths and worthy of consideration in other interface contexts where practicable and feasible.

8.2.2 Intra and Inter-Community Development Work:

3. The voluntary work of the White City interface workers is underpinned to maintain and build upon the significant improvements in interface relations in the Whitewell area. It is unrealistic to suppose that this process can be further developed without infrastructure and properly resourced programmes. Funding for development posts within White City is also required as it is equally unrealistic to expect this vital (full time) development work to be carried out by people who are sustained only by social security benefits.
4. The communication structures between the Whitewell communities such as the (IFI / CRC funded) mobile phone network and interface forum meetings need to be expanded to include neighbouring communities such as Longlands and Bawnmore.
5. Intra-community processes are initiated and supported to address overtly sectarian attitudes which discourage positive interaction and encourage hostility between the communities.
6. Multi-agency community partnerships (where the PSNI and other agencies address a community's needs as identified through environmental audits) are established to address community concerns such as anti-social behaviour.
7. 'Reconnection' processes are initiated to address (a) the 'detachment' of the Longlands estate in relation to the wider Whitewell community, and (b) the perception amongst many within the protestant community of Whitewell that 'their' politicians are *absent, and disinterested*.
8. Policy makers in planning, housing, neighbourhood renewal, community development and community relations need to be engaged in a discussion about the implications of the project for their individual and collective roles in Whitewell.

8.2.3 Access and Equality:

9. Inter-community processes are initiated and supported to urgently address restrictions in local mobility onto the Whitewell and Shore Roads.
10. Key stakeholders in the Whitewell area (including the two integrated schools) are supported in exploring opportunities for the creation of shared space.
11. NISRA, through NIMDM and other deprivation indices, find new ways of accurately measuring proximity to services which take account of denied access and chill factors relating to the 'other' community.
12. The denial of access needs to be acknowledged as a form of hate crime and freedom of access is measured and used as an indicator of equality.

8.2.4 Youth Work:

13. The chronic under-resourcing of youth provision in the Whitewell area is addressed with designated youth workers and appropriate youth programmes in each community.

14. As part of a significant investment in youth provision, adequately resourced programmes aimed at addressing endemic underage drinking, drug use and anti-social behaviour are implemented in the Whitewell area.
15. Future youth engagement processes in the Whitewell area are framed round the concept of the *triple track approach*, which engages with the three youth generations at the same time, i.e. the 'problem' *secondary* generation of teenagers who are (a) negatively influenced by an older *third* generation, and (b) eventually replaced by the younger *primary* generation.

8.3 Policy Implications

8.3.1 The Need for a Comprehensive Interface Strategy

- a) This study has highlighted the need for serious, coordinated and long term support for interface work. There is, currently, high level and international momentum behind a renewed aspiration to rid Belfast of physical interface structures over time. There is a disconnection, however, between this aspiration and the on the ground support needed to make it happen. Initiatives such as the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project have been successful in reducing tension, changing the local context for more meaningful cross-community engagement, and beginning to improve the quality of life for people 'trapped' in segregated territory. It has not removed interface structures, nor has it addressed all the problems of access. However, it is the start of a local development process that acknowledges the patient, high risk, long-term and complex nature of any process which effectively tackles the fear, territoriality, manipulation and sectarianism that creates and maintains 'peacelines' across the city.
- b) This type of intervention has been delivered on an incremental, project and crisis response basis and the effectiveness of these processes is limited by weak and inadequate funding and official support. The project highlights the need for a comprehensive **Interface Strategy**, developed by OFMDFM in partnership with policy makers responsible for urban regeneration, planning, housing, policing and community development. This would take the form of an agreed objective in the Programme for Government with cross-party support in the Executive. Specifically, the strategy would:
 - Develop a process of local consultation that engages the people, not just elected representatives and community leaders, in an open debate about the impact of interfaces and how they would like to see these changed;
 - Develop an agreed set of objectives about the future of interfaces, including a longer term process of negotiated removal based on the feasibility, desirability and risk associated with such an option;
 - Determine a series of area based programmes to support interventions to address the effects of interfacing on surrounding communities;
 - Promote the agreement of specific commitments by the police, housing, transport, urban regeneration and community development agencies to support actions to reinforce the redevelopment of these places;

- Promote the adoption of interface areas as a separate land use category which would prioritise, help coordinate and ensure delivery of actions in these areas;
- Promote a dedicated youth intervention strategy to develop and apply practice to other communities and areas; we have suggested how that programme might be developed earlier in this section;
- Dedicate sufficient resources, identified in the Programme for Government and associated budget, to support the strategy; and
- Include a clear monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure that progress is being made against agreed objectives for each area.

Some Key Agency Responsibilities:

- c) It is also important that the implications of the Whitewell project are placed on the desks of key organisations with responsibilities in this area. These include:
- Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships (and their respective strategies) need to ensure that there is financial and resource support for front line projects, especially where they engage young people in interface locations. We have also noted the complex interplay between lack of access, deprivation and social problems including drug and alcohol misuse that can only be meaningfully addressed by comprehensive well-resourced area based strategies.
 - However, it is also important that the Department for Social Development's urban regeneration group prioritise interface issues and youth intervention specifically, particularly as Regeneration Frameworks are being prepared by area partnerships across Belfast. Here, it is also vital that Belfast City Council prioritise interfacing as a policy issue and in its support for community based projects. The Council has carried out a number of innovative projects on planning and community relations under its good relations programme and the delivery of this programme could assist in the direction of resources toward interface interventions.
 - Linked to this, it is also important that the Community Relations Council build on its commitment to strengthen interventions in 'peaceline' areas in ways that support realistic negotiated interventions for their ultimate removal over time. Without restructuring local relations, tackling lack of access and dealing with serious socio-economic deprivation, any discussion about the short term removal of interfaces is, in our experience, premature and counter-productive. Here, community development funding by DSD, NICVA and the Councils needs to build the capacities that have helped to make the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project a success.
 - It should be emphasised, however, that problems of access are not just about good relations and that imaginative interventions are required to better connect enclave communities with facilities, jobs, training and sites of enjoyment. A review of public and community transport schemes could ensure that they are sensitised to the way in which people in places such as White City actually use the neighbourhood services around them. This could result in the development of transport systems that are flexible,

responsive to demand and negotiate the territorial barriers that accentuate the exclusion we have shown in this case study.

- The concept of ‘designing out crime,’ alongside community policing, also has an important role to play and it is important that District Policing Partnerships identify interfaces as a strategic priority.
- Finally, policy areas around the built environment including housing and planning need to more clearly respond to the information contained in this case study report of the Whitewell Youth Mediation Project. We noted earlier that the designation of interface areas in planning zoning would help to prioritise the spatial effects on communities that surround them. Housing management and planning also need to explore how pedestrian and car-based access is designed to allow safe and easy movement from interface areas.

Interface areas require the same intensive planning, resources and organisational leadership that have made areas such as *Laganside* in Belfast such a success. Without the same high level policy, financial and political commitment, ‘peacelines’ are always likely to hallmark those parts of the city that have not benefited from peace and economic progress in the way that other places have. This case study demonstrates the art of the possible and sets out some positive recommendations about how, when and where to intervene to help create new hope and opportunity at the interface.

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10. *Appendices*

Appendix 1.

Project partners and participants:

The agency partners involved in the funding, management, and facilitation of this project were as follows:

Intercomm - Founded in 1995 as a direct response to grassroots community concerns about inter-community conflict and social deprivation in north Belfast. Through a diverse range of programmes Intercomm aims to assist in combating the social, economic and political problems created by 30 years of conflict and help construct a concrete and viable peace. Intercomm has initiated and facilitated dialogue on a range of diverse and sensitive issues among stakeholders primarily in the north of Belfast. The North Belfast Developing Leadership Initiative is an experimental programme that seeks to develop local capacity by empowering people to creatively engage in decision-making processes that affect their everyday life. The cornerstone of Intercomm's peace building strategy is most importantly the people of North Belfast. Those who have intimately experienced the effects of conflict are the key resource in the project's aim to transcend community division through dialogue.

Two Parks Youth Project (TPYP) – This project is a partnership between the Greencastle and Newington communities, working through the Ashton Community Trust as a lead partner, delivering outreach youth work in the two working class communities. The project is a two year pilot project which ends in may 2009. This project is funded through the Big Lottery, with the aim to increase youth participation within a number of spheres, Health, Education, Participation and Rights. The project title derives from the fact that both communities are linked in that they each have a park (Finlay and Alexander). Project officers are Hugo Armstrong (Newington) and Sean Montgomery (Greencastle). As outreach youth workers, they work to support the local community and build upon the working partnership that benefits young people and their community. The project's lead partner, the Ashton Community Trust (ACT) is a registered charity and was formed in 1992 under a trust deed, before being established as a company limited by guarantee in 1998. Over its 16-year history the Ashton Centre has maintained a community development ethos, with an emphasis on responding to and serving the needs of the local population.

Whitewell Transformation Project (WTP) – This embryonic group represents the coming together of key influencers and concerned residents from the PUL community of White City whose aims are to address such things as inter-community violence, isolated sectarian attacks, suspicions, pre-conceptions and anti-social behaviour. The group's overarching aim is to address the above issues through a peace-building strategy in partnership with all parties and groups in the Whitewell area. Their key objective is to work towards creating the right circumstances in the Whitewell area where traditional community development can take place in order to create a shared future. Within the past three years the component groups who make up this project have (against a background of paramilitary feuding, sporadic sectarian attacks on their

community, and reticence to engage in cross-community activity from within section of their own community) worked to contain conflict between the communities through their roles in mobile phone networks, youth diversionary work and processes of inter-community dialogue.

North Belfast Community Action Unit (NBCAU) – Part of the Department for Social Development, the Unit was set up in August 2002 following a report on social and community in North Belfast, ‘The Dunlop Report’. The report recommended that Government should set up a dedicated unit to: build community capacity, develop a long term strategy for the area, encourage partnerships, and take responsibility for addressing issues in interface areas. The Unit is working with all the communities in North Belfast to build partnerships and to help people to work together to improve their lives. The Unit continues to work closely with 13 Community Empowerment Partnerships (CEP). It supports them to deliver building capacity programmes to the people living in North Belfast.

Belfast Interface Project (BIP) - Established in 1995 with a remit to identify the major issues of concern to interface communities in Belfast and, in consultation with community, statutory and voluntary sectors, to assist in identifying effective means of addressing these issues and facilitating these processes where possible. BIP became a membership organisation in 2000 and currently has a membership of approx 45 community groups from nationalist and unionist interface areas of Belfast as well as a smaller number (approx 15) of associate and individual members. BIP’s work in recent years has primarily been in the areas of research into interface issues, facilitation and mediation work, provision of membership support and networking and information-sharing opportunities, and trying to influence policy where possible. Erik Cownie, author of this report, is employed under the auspices of BIP’s Conflict Transformation Support Project which aims to support capacity-building in interface areas with which to undertake effective conflict transformation work.

Appendix 2

NISRA and NIMDM Tables for Bellevue and Valley Wards

Demography:

Comparisons from Census 2001*	Bellevue Ward	Valley Ward	North Belfast	Northern Ireland
Resident population	4942	3107	86066	1685267
% persons under 16 years old	24.0	20.0	23.3	23.6
% persons aged 60 and over	18.8	26.0	21.8	17.6
% male	47.4	45.6	46.7	48.7
% female	52.6	54.4	53.3	51.3
% Catholic Community Background	60.7	51.5	44.9	43.8
% Protestant and Other Christian (related) Community Background	35.2	45.2	51.9	53.1
Average age of population	35.7	40.0	37.5	35.8
Population density (persons per hectare)	16.68	15.75	21.62	1.19
% persons 16 and over single (never married)	36.4	37.0	36.3	33.1
Births 2004	55	40	1087	22318
% of births to unmarried mothers 2004	38.2	57.5	62.4	34.5
Total Period Fertility Rate 2000 - 2004	1.85	1.71	1.82	1.80
Deaths 2004	33	39	926	14354
Standard Mortality Ratio (all ages) 2000 - 2004	76	110	-	100
Standard Mortality Rate for 75 years and under 2000 - 2004	73	124	-	100

*Datasets used: Census 2001: (NISRA Census Office)
Births 2004 and Deaths 2004 (NISRA Demography Branch).

Deprivation:

This NISRA sourced data is based on the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2005 (NIMDM 2005). The below listed ranks range from 1 (most deprived) to 582 (least deprived).

Ranks from NIMDM 2005*	Bellevue Ward	Valley Ward	
Multiple Deprivation Measure	184	70	
Income Domain	184	88	
Employment Domain	207	83	
Health Deprivation and Disability Domain	75	61	
Education, Skills and Training Domain	254	72	
Proximity to Services Domain	493	506	
Living Environment Domain	272	129	
Crime and Disorder Domain	37	47	

*Datasets used: Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2005 (NISRA).

Education, Employment and Economic Activity:

Comparisons from Census 2001*	Bellevue Ward	Valley Ward	North Belfast	Northern Ireland
% Degree level or higher qualifications	15.0	9.9	11.3	15.8
% Economically active	59.1	55.8	53.3	62.3
% Economically inactive	40.9	44.2	46.7	37.7
% Unemployed	5.1	5.9	6.0	4.1
% Of unemployed, who were long term unemployed	37.1	41.9	44.9	40.4
% of School leavers gained 5 or more GCSEs at C grade or over 2004 - 2005	70.3	52.4	52.3	63.1
% of School leavers continued to higher education 2004 - 2005	39.1	14.3	28.3	38.2
% of School leavers continued to further education 2004 - 2005	20.3	14.3	17.9	27.6
% of the post primary school population entitled to free school meals 2006	24.8	34.1	35.2	18.9
% of persons 18 -59 claimed Income Support 2004*	12.6	17.4	21.4	10.8
% of persons 18 – 59 / 64 claimed Incapacity Benefit 2004*	10.6	14.4	16.2	10.7
% of persons 16+ claimed Housing Benefit 2004	11.4	16.8	19.8	9.7
Employee jobs 2005	635	2916	43720	683054

*Datasets used: Census 2001 (NISRA Census Office)
Benefit data 2004 (DSD), Employment data 2005 (DETI), School data 2005 -2006 (DE)

Health and Care:

Comparisons from Census 2001*	Bellevue Ward	Valley Ward	North Belfast	Northern Ireland
% people with limiting long-term illness	22.4	28.0	27.5	20.4
% population provided unpaid care to family, friends, neighbours or others	12.1	11.0	11.9	11.0
% people stated their health was good	67.0	61.4	61.8	70.0
Administrative Data Hospital episodes 2005 - 2006	1910	1160	31643	582533
% of children aged 3 – 5 registered with a dentist 2005	56.8	63.1	58.8	62.4

*Datasets used: Census 2001 (NISRA Census Office) Health data 2002, 2005, 2005 -2006 (DHSSPS)

Housing and Transport:

Comparisons from Census 2001*	Bellevue Ward	Valley Ward	North Belfast	Northern Ireland
Number of households	2010	1393	36383	626718
% owner occupied	67.9	44.07	51.7	69.6
% rented	32.1	55.3	48.3	30.4
% owned outright	25.9	17.3	22.6	29.4
% lone pensioner households	12.8	17.7	17.8	12.8
% lone parent households with dependent children	12.6	13.4	13.3	8.1
% one or more persons with a limiting long-term illness	43.1	47.2	50.2	41.3
Average household size	2.46	2.18	2.34	2.65
% of households had access to car	63.9	54.6	50.8	73.7
% of persons aged 16-74 in employment usually travelled to work by car or van	66.2	57.9	57.2	70.6
Cars were licensed (2005)	1650	1061	24438	763663

*Datasets used: Census 2001 (NISRA Census Office), Cars registered 2005, (DVLNI)

Crime and Justice:

Recorded Crime PSNI (2005/06)*	Valley Ward	Bellevue Ward	North Belfast	Northern Ireland
Total offences recorded	612	419	9436	123194
% offences against the person	16.3	24.3	26.7	25.1
% burglary	9.3	7.4	8.5	10.4
% theft	46.5	12.9	22.0	23.9
% criminal damage	14.9	46.1	28.7	28.2

*Datasets used: PSNI Records of Recorded Crime 2005 / 2006

Appendix 3.

Transcript of Interview with Chef Inspector Muir Clark (Area Commander) 'A' District North Belfast PSNI, held at York Road Police Station on Tuesday 17th June 2008

Question:

Chief Inspector, can you give me a brief overview of the Whitewell area in terms of how the PSNI view developments within community relations in the past 2 -3 years?

Answer:

Well, for the PSNI the Whitewell is essentially divided into three areas;

- Lower Whitewell, which also incorporates Graymount
- Mid Whitewell, which also incorporates White City
- Upper Whitewell, which also incorporates the Throne estate and the 'bridge'

The 'bridge' of course refers to the physical interface between White City and the Longlands estate. You have got to remember that the Longlands estate falls outside my North Belfast jurisdiction, it comes under Newtownabbey. The Lower Whitewell / Graymount, and the White City / Serpentine areas have long been flashpoints; we have seen some very serious trouble there over the years. These areas have improved over the past two years, most notably over the past (one) year. This I feel is down to community workers on both sides, improved communications between the communities, the out-workings and results of projects, and basically the beginning of a shared understanding between the communities which is embedded in the consciousness.

There is an entirely different dynamic down there now, more tolerance amongst both communities. What we have seen now is that there has not been a concerted attack on the Throne estate since early to mid 2006, also that the Orange Hall (Whitewell Road) has not been attacked since 2006. These are important; these are significant markers in terms of moving away from inter-community conflict.

Question:

Can you tell me what you think brought this improved situation about?

Answer:

Bluntly, what we had here, happening simultaneously, was voluntary interface community workers in White City taking responsibility with respect to their obligations, and nationalist interface workers taking similar responsibility for theirs. Our first engagement with the White City workers resulted from a request from Charlie and others in early 2007 for a meeting to discuss interface related issues. We took this request very seriously. My line always is that I will do whatever I can, speak to whoever I need to, in order to further improvements in interface or community relations. We therefore agreed to meet them to explore their problems; I wanted to test them, to see if this engagement could be constructive. It was, and we have had a meaningful relationship with them since then.

Question:

Did the White City workers pass these tests you set them?

Answer:

Unequivocally yes. We met them in relation to a Republican march, Easter 2007. We were very unsure as to how this would go; these were highly sensitive issues, agreeing routes, marshalling procedures, protests etc. This had never been done before in this area. We based PSNI operations for the day on these agreements; of course we had a plan 'B'. They said they would deliver, and they did deliver, we knew then we were dealing with the right people, people who could deliver, people whose word we could take. Since that time I have always found that to be the case. We have had some very difficult conversations over the past two and a half years, certainly around the Arthur Bridge and the attacks on White City. At these difficult meetings the White City reps left us in no doubt that they were unhappy with PSNI response times and that they felt ignored. This was at the time of Sinn Fein taking their place at Policing Boards etc. Do you know the adage about spinning plates? You are constantly trying to keep all the plates spinning, trying to keep a lid on things. Maybe that is what happened. Trust had to be re-established. The set up in relation to meeting with White City reps was, and to an extent still is, too ad hoc. We would like to work towards more regulated formal meetings, say bi-monthly, yes, say six per year, more perhaps around times of parades. I expect the PSNI to have a finger on the pulse, to know what the community's immediate concerns are.

Question:

Can I ask you about your view in relation to Sinn Fein's contribution to interface management, specifically in respect of the current difficulties at the White City / Longlands interface?

Answer:

I believe that Sinn Fein are doing everything they possibly can. There is a genuine drive for change there. Sinn Fein do not want this type of activity, these attacks from Longlands to happen. They do not want to see this happening to White City. I think the problem with Longlands is the weaker community infrastructure. They do not seem to have anyone to engage with. The Longlands estate is basically an 'island' cut off by the motorway. I feel this detachment, this isolation is a factor.

Question:

The project this case study is concerned with is essentially about engaging with disaffected youth from the Whitewell area; what is PSNI policy in this regard?

Answer:

We have begun to engage with young people from White City in the 13 – 19 year age group. This has not happened yet in the Roman Catholic community. We have been told by community reps that the kids are not ready yet. I hope and expect things to change in the near future. It is all about how I engage with both sets of kids, separately first. I need to know what they want to do, is it to drink and riot? What is going to take to divert their attention? The PSNI need to allow these kids to find out about the Police, and the role of the Police in their community, and the PSNI need to find out about these kids, about 'kids culture' and how we can help them overcome the challenges they face.

Question:

What do you think are the key challenges in relation to youth culture?

Answer:

Well I am afraid to say that I feel we have endemic, widespread underage drinking. I would be very concerned about this. Every weekend we take drink, 'carry outs' from 12 – 17 year olds. It is not about criminalising these young people; we do not set out to charge them or haul them up before the courts; it is however about accepting that we have a major social problem here. The scale is unbelievable. In North Belfast as a whole we would confiscate hundreds of bottles every single weekend; even in the Whitewell area you are talking about several confiscations most weekends. This is a cause of great concern to me and my officers. Alcohol is a dis-inhibitor; it makes young people think they are invincible. It makes them do things totally out of character, rowdy behaviour, underage sex, violent behaviour, bravado "there is a prod, there is a catholic, lets attack them". I would also be very concerned that this level of underage drinking is pushing these young people towards drug use. Alcohol in these circumstances is a gateway to drugs.

I am very worried about the level of drug use. These kids think that it is safe to smoke 'blow', it is not. It will seriously mess their heads up. This will lead to long term and life long psychological problems. I had dealings a few years ago with a man who was concerned with his wayward teenage son, "I think my son is taking blow" he said. Two, maybe three years later I meet this man again, I enquired as to his sons' wellbeing and the man breaks down crying, "He is in Holywell mental hospital, doctors said it was the cannabis", said his distraught father. This is a big deal.

Question:

What would you like to see happening in the Whitewell area to tackle some of the problems you have spoke about this afternoon?

Answer:

To address sectarianism I would like to see community workers, both loyalist and republican say to kids "look I knew Jimmy Blogs; he was my friend, killed by loyalists, by republicans, by police. Now we talk to them, we are over that, we work with them. If this message comes from persons who have standing, who are respected, that is community leadership. In regard to the wider subject of youth engagement, I feel what is required is a process which encompasses all three stages of youth development: the primary generation (aged 5 – 12), the secondary generation (aged 12 – 16), and the third generation (aged 17 – 20). All these age brackets need to be worked on in a triple-track approach. If you concentrate only on the second generation, in effect the problem generation, the younger generation will simply take their place. Equally you cannot ignore the older generation, for it is this group who hold influence over the younger groups, these are the role models, this is the source of peer pressure.

Society and communities also need early detection systems in relation to problem children. Why is it that if John or Jane are way off track at primary age, and people are saying "they are going to get into trouble", then when the kids are 12 or 13 go "I told you so, didn't I tell you". Why do we do that? Why

do we let that happen? Why don't we intervene? Why does it have to become a very real problem before someone fixes it? We need to address these social issues before they become intractable problems.

Question:

What do you see as the role of PSNI within community development processes?

Answer:

As a partner, and as a contributor to a community's development. While the PSNI cannot ever be a panacea to every community's every problem, there is a role for the police service within community partnership or forum structures. These partnerships would include the Housing Executive, the local council, social and statutory agencies, and the PSNI. So if a community says "We are getting tortured in Finlay Park with anti-social behaviour", an environmental audit could be carried out. So, the out-comes of the audit indicate that new lighting is required, and that intervention patrolling is required from the PSNI. In such a structure everyone takes tasks away from meetings, at follow up meetings contributors will say "we got this done", and then you look at the situation again and ask "What more do we need to do?" This kind of approach can address issues like street drinking, or problems around certain bars, where we can bring the licensing bodies into the process. It simply is not enough for a community to say "we need to address anti-social behaviour", we need to be much more specific.

Question:

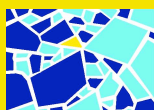
Finally, Chief Inspector, what do you think the future holds for the Whitewell area and beyond?

Answer:

On the whole I am optimistic. If someone in 1992 had said that in 2008 this is what the future is going to look like, I would have laughed them off the planet. So that tells me that where there is a genuine desire for change, big things can happen. It is my belief that such a desire exists in Whitewell, and indeed beyond. The critical question is how we stimulate that continuous desire for change at the micro level.

The Whitewell Youth Mediation Project is an initiative to address youth-led interface violence, mobility restrictions and contemporary urban youth issues at a local level. This report is a case study of this ongoing project, documented through interviews and focus group discussions with project partners and participants.

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