



Report on the Feasibility of Establishing a Community Planning Support Service for Ballymun





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I. Introduction

This report examines the need for and feasibility of establishing a Community Planning Support Service for Ballymun. It was commissioned by Ballymun Community Organisations Network (BCON) with funding from the Dormant Accounts Fund administered by RAPID and prepared by Community Places (formerly Community Technical Aid). Community Places is based in Belfast and provides community planning support to communities throughout Northern Ireland.

Following an introductory section on the development and ongoing regeneration of the Ballymun area the report:

- sets out the policy context for community involvement in spatial planning and regeneration. This includes references to national policies, policy development within Dublin city, the emergence of Community Planning in Britain and Ireland in recent years and the provision of Planning Aid.
- presents evidence of the need for a support services to strengthen community involvement in the regeneration of Ballymun and in the planning for its sustainability. This includes the findings of consultation with stakeholders and of research and other reports on community involvement in the area;
- presents conclusions and makes recommendations on supporting and strengthening community involvement for the long-term sustainability of the new Ballymun.



2. Development and Regeneration of Ballymun

In August 1966 the first residents of the new housing developed in Ballymun moved in. The following year the first residents moved into the newly built flats. The construction of 3,000 new dwellings (primarily flats) was completed in 1969 and Dublin Corporation became responsible for management. The original plans for the new Ballymun area had included community and public facilities but few of these were built during this period. Early in the life of the new flats problems with the lifts and heating system developed, cracks appeared on the walls of the tower blocks and leaking roofs in some flats had to be replaced.

The introduction of a sales policy for local authority housing in the late 1970s coupled with an incentive scheme in 1984 resulted in those who were able to buy moving out of the flats. The late 1980s saw many empty flats in the area and the development of severe social problems often associated with illegal drugs and very high levels of unemployment and poverty. Campaigning by local tenants' associations and community groups developed apace during this period and in 1987 a Task Force of community and political representatives and statutory bodies was formed to secure refurbishment and improvements to the flats. This resulted in the announcement by Government in 1988 of a Remedial Works Scheme for the flats.

The pilot scheme for 280 flats was delayed. It began in 1991 and was accompanied by a more localised approach to estate management. An evaluation of the pilot scheme in 1993 recommended that all the flats except the seven tower blocks be demolished and a Community Compact for local involvement in planning and regeneration agreed. In 1995 the Task Force proposed that the six towers be demolished and all the flats blocks refurbished. In 1996 the Dublin Corporation and Minister for the Environment announced the demolition of all the flats.

Ballymun Regeneration Limited (BRL) was established in 1997 as a company owned by Dublin Corporation. Its remit was to develop and implement a Masterplan¹ for regeneration of the area. This Masterplan sat within an Integrated Area Plan prepared by BRL under the 1998 Urban Renewal Scheme. The Integrated Plan covered an area larger than the housing estate and allowed designation of the area for tax relief for the building of private sector housing.

A wide-ranging consultation exercise for the Masterplan was facilitated by an external firm of consultants. The Task Force proposed a Charter of Rights and Responsibilities (similar to the Community Compact proposed four years earlier by the Evaluation report). This was not included in the Masterplan launched in 1998 which included provision for housing, job creation and education, community and neighbourhood facilities and a new town centre with a shopping complex. The Masterplan envisaged that the regeneration programme would be completed in 2006. The first of the new houses built under the Masterplan were completed in 2001. In 2002 a review of the Task Force resulted in the establishment of the Ballymun Neighbourhood Council (BNC) as the recognised liaison body for BRL, Dublin City Corporation, Ballymun Partnership, the Gardaí and local politicians. It is envisaged that the regeneration programme will now be completed in 2012.



3. Policy Context for Community Involvement

This section of the report describes the Government's overall policy approach to community involvement and partnership working with community and voluntary groups. It also examines the policy context for community involvement in planning and the emergence of Community Planning here and in other countries.

Partnership and Participation

3.1 Supporting Voluntary Activity

The bedrock for the involvement of community groups in policy making and implementation was established by the Government in 2000 in "Supporting Voluntary Activity"². This policy confirmed the Government's view that community and voluntary groups make an essential contribution to "the creation of a vibrant, participative democracy and civil society". The policy aims include the introduction of mechanisms to enable groups "and the communities they represent to have an input to policy making". Addressing Government's role in enabling the sector the policy refers to:

- the provision of technical advice and support;
- support for networking and developing relationships with statutory agencies;
- support in community development skills; and
- support in the involvement and participation of the most marginalised.

3.2 Active Citizenship

Government policy on enabling participation and supporting community involvement has been further developed and strengthened in recent years. The Government Task Force on Active Citizenship published its report in 2007³. Its ten Guiding Principles for Active Citizenship emphasise the need:

- to enable and empower decision making as close to the citizen as possible; and
- for respectful dialogue between Government, citizens and communities.

3.3 Social Partnership Agreement

"Towards 2016 - Ten Year Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015"⁴ builds on the theme of supporting voluntary activity. It stresses that Government recognises community activity "forms the very core of a vibrant and inclusive society". Furthermore it states that effective consultation by all parts of Government must provide meaningful opportunity for input into shaping policy issues and implementation:

"Government Departments will manage the consultation process effectively by giving sufficient notice, information and appropriate process for engagement ... "



3.4 Regeneration, Planning and Community Involvement

Government overall policy for community involvement in planning is reflected in the Department of Environment and Local Government 2007 Guidelines for Planning Authorities in the preparation of Development Plans⁵. The Guidelines frequently refer to the need for good practice in community involvement including:

- "consultation should reach out to those whose views may not have been canvassed in the past ... "
- "local planning authorities should involve the community at an early stage ... "
- "the community should also be involved in the monitoring process to help assess impact ... "
- "the consultation process [should] be fully informed by the availability of soundly based data on issues and options"

The outworkings of these Guidelines and in particular the emphasis on early consultation is exemplified by the approach taken by planners in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown where they worked with the South Side Partnership in identifying local community issues the new Development Plan might address.

Dublin City Council has recognised that difficulties in accessing and understanding planning language and processes is a barrier to involvement. It has appointed two planning officers to help citizens and community groups understand planning applications and the procedures for making objections to development proposals.

The City Development Plan⁶ refers to the "City of Neighbourhoods" strategy as an important vehicle for involving communities. The strategy's objectives and associated priority actions include the provision of capacity building and leadership development to underpin involvement. The strategy also commits to providing "those who want to be consulted (ie residents) with the tools to do so". Some of these tools were piloted in Dublin through the Council's participation in the European Union Four Cities Project (from 2000 to 2004). This Project enabled planners and communities in each of the four cities (Dublin, Belfast, Brussels and Liverpool) to learn from each other and develop and practice tools for community participation in planning and regeneration.

3.5 Community Planning

During the past decade Community Planning has been introduced in various forms in Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland. It will also be introduced in Northern Ireland as part of the reform of local government which will take place in 2011. In Scotland Community Planning was introduced as a legislative requirement on local authorities and other agencies and the proposals for Northern Ireland follow this approach. In Ireland and England Community Planning is the responsibility of City/County Development Boards (CDBs) and Strategic Regeneration Partnerships respectively. The reform process in Northern Ireland was informed by a research report of Community Planning in each jurisdiction (Case Study Analyses for RPA on Community Planning within UK and Ireland)⁷. The report identified commonalities



across the case studies examined. Essential features for effective Community Planning include:

- a commitment to community involvement matched and supported by resources and processes to enable effective engagement between communities and decision makers;
- a partnership approach based on a shared vision underpinned by an action plan agreed by all partners;
- a focus on improving the effectiveness and targeting of public services.

In each of the jurisdictions where it has been introduced Community Planning is seen as central to improving the planning and delivery of public services. In Scotland local authorities have lead responsibility for facilitating Community Planning. COSLA (the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) took a leading role in both initiating and shaping Community Planning and statutory guidance for community involvement has been introduced to ensure good practice is followed consistently by the Community Planning Partnerships in each local authority area. In turn each Partnership provides resources to support community involvement and ensures communities have access to advice and assistance with Community Planning issues. Similar processes and arrangements are in place in England though guidance there - while mandatory - is not on a statutory basis. The intention in Northern Ireland is that statutory guidance will be introduced and based on the learning from a number of pilot community plans.

3.6 Policy Context - Conclusions

This overview of the context for community involvement in planning, regeneration and broader policy issues indicates that an enabling policy framework is in place at national and city-wide levels. However it is also evident that policy makers in many environments have recognised that both resources and mechanisms are required to ensure that policy aspirations are realised. This issue is further evidenced and elaborated in Section 5.



4. Evidence of Need for Support for Community Involvement

This section of the report presents evidence on the need for support and resources to enable meaningful community involvement. It includes references to reports on community involvement nationally, across the Dublin city area and within Ballymun.

The National Picture

4.1 Task Force on Active Citizenship

The Government Task Force on Active Citizenship reported in March 2007 on the barriers to citizen and community involvement and the steps required to support and develop participation in the democratic and decision making process. The Task Force received over 1,000 submissions and held discussions with a wide range of groups and individuals. It reported that despite the diversity of participants there was a "strong shared view on what the barriers to Active Citizenship and civic participation were and what needs to be done to support it in the future". These barriers included:

- many people felt cut off from decision making and that getting involved did not make the difference it could or it should;
- a lack of confidence in democratic and some other consultative structures, particularly at local level;
- a perceived absence of meaningful opportunities for civic participation in decision making about local issues.

The Task Force report stresses that, despite these barriers to participation, community organisations were seen by many contributors to its deliberations as the backbone of Active Citizenship "with the ability to achieve trust, cohesion and confidence in ways that government cannot achieve on its own". The Task Force report states that a concerted effort is needed to address current obstacles at all levels and this includes the provision of capacity building and lifelong learning.

4.2 Irish Planning Institute

The Irish Planning Institute has drawn attention to the curtailment of citizens' rights in the field of planning. In its submission in 2007 to the review of the Irish Public Service⁸ the Institute called for a shift in public service ethos away from being "customer focused" to being "citizen focused". It stressed that the introduction of the requirement to pay fees for planning information and involvement "is a curtailment of the right of citizens in a democratic state". It thus called for the abolition of these restrictions to citizen empowerment.



The Dublin City Experience

4.3 Report for Combat Poverty

A research report for Combat Poverty by the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at Trinity College Dublin⁹ focuses on community participation in planning across the city. The researchers interviewed planners, urban managers and officials in the Department of Environment and Local Government, and drew on the experience of five communities in Dublin (including Ballymun), the Tallaght community and an estate in Waterford.

The researchers report that the planners and other officials interviewed identified significant difficulties in facilitating community participation. These ranged from the value placed on community participation to the under-resourcing of technical assistance and capacity building and from time constraints to the resourcing of local authorities. The issue of lack of support and capacity to engage with planning and development issues was also identified in the case studies. The researchers' conclusion drew attention to the need for impartial planning advice for communities.

The Ballymun Experience

4.4 Auditor General's Report

A Special Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (2007)¹⁰ released in March 2008 focused on progress in implementing the Masterplan for Ballymun and the challenges remaining for successful completion. The Auditor General's report states that "there is no overall strategy for consultation and involvement with residents or with other stakeholders". The report notes dissatisfaction with community consultation and involvement and indicates that a more strategic approach is required. This would include greater co-ordination to stimulate involvement and realise the potential for community development. The report records that some of those interviewed felt that members of the Neighbourhood Forums were not being adequately supported and that capacity building was needed. The report states that "Consultation on the regeneration with groups and organisations from all sectors is an area which requires a more strategic and inclusive approach and which may benefit from external specialist advice".

4.5 Ballymun Regeneration Limited

Section One of this report refers to the wide ranging consultation process undertaken in 1997 to inform the preparation of the Masterplan by Ballymun Regeneration Limited (BRL). In an interview for this report the BRL Chief Executive and Senior Planner drew attention to the extent of this process as a clear indication of BRL's commitment to community involvement. They also referred to consultation exercises undertaken for individual schemes, the development of play and neighbourhood facilities, the provision of significant funding for capacity building and BRL support for the Forums, the Neighbourhood Council and other projects and initiatives. They stressed the scale of the regeneration programme and the complexities of implementing change at this level while seeking to retain the resident population.



The BRL representatives expressed the view that the long history of community campaigning for improvements continued to dominate the perspective and approach of many who participated in consultation exercises. They said that there is a wide range of skills and views within the community but that too often the loudest voices are dominant. They agreed that, like other aspects of regeneration, community involvement could perhaps always be improved but emphasised that the approach and mindset of some in the community is a major factor which needs to be addressed to bring about improvement in community involvement.

4.6 Area Forums and Community Groups

The scale and complexity of the regeneration programme is also an enormous challenge for the community representatives and groups of the area. Those who have taken on the responsibility of articulating the views and needs of residents are endeavouring to do so without the benefit of planning, architectural or other independent technical support. The difficulties this has and continues to create for members of the Area Forums, residents' groups, community and voluntary groups was a constant theme of the consultation meetings and interviews. This included those who have been involved from the beginning of the regeneration programme and have had to "learn on the job" over the past years. It is noteworthy that many of the community consultees commented that planners and urban regeneration officers also lacked skills and experience of community involvement and that some have developed the skills and approaches needed more readily than others.

The issues identified during the community consultation included:

- **understanding plans** - the difficulties lay people encounter in "reading" and understanding plans and drawings was frequently raised. This often means that:
 - people "do not know what questions to ask";
 - do not appreciate the practical implications of proposals;
 - have great difficulty in explaining plan proposals to others; and
 - often only truly understand plans and drawings when they are implemented and it is too late.
- **use of jargon** - this issue is linked to, reinforces and compounds the above. It is summed up in the statement "they use their jargon". Planners are thus often seen as communicating in a different language and thus unable to involve people in meaningful ways.
- **valuing community expertise** - a view expressed often, and frequently with passion, was that most planners and urban developers do not value the views of local people and groups. This did not apply to all planners and urban regeneration professionals and it was noteworthy that the few exceptions were often referred to by name. However too often, in the view of most consultees, the community was not seen as having expertise or knowledge of value to the regeneration process.
- **lack of community ownership** - many community consultees expressed the view that there is less community ownership of the emerging new Ballymun than there needs to be if regeneration is to be sustainable. Their concern is that although much has been achieved in terms of new housing and the environment this has



lacked the level of partnership with the community which is needed to build the foundations for the future.

It is interesting to note that each of the above issues resonates with the findings of the wider research on community participation commissioned by Combat Poverty (see paragraph 4.3):

- **consultation standards** - this refers to a range of concerns:
 - lack of clarity on how each consultation exercise is being undertaken;
 - absence of a strategy, planned and consistent approach; over-emphasis on written comments in an oral culture and an area of educational disadvantage;
 - lack of feedback;
 - insufficient access to information in a timely manner which allows consultees to influence decisions and outcomes - "consultation shouldn't be telling us what is going to happen".

The Auditor General's Report (see paragraph 4.4) similarly refers to the absence of a strategic and co-ordinated approach to consultation and involvement.

- **absence of trust** - this was referred to repeatedly by many community consultees. A few who did so said trust building requires effort by all but most said that BRL, as the decision makers with all the information, has the greater responsibility to inform community involvement - "we have to keep at them [BRL] all the time" and "they tell you what they don't mind you hearing" are typical of comments made. On the issue of trust some consultees expressed the view that the attitude of some professionals to local residents was a barrier to trust building and that many of them lack skills in communicating with people outside their own professional sphere.
- **need for independent technical aid** - a range of consultees suggested that community representatives and groups need access to independent technical help to enable them to both understand planning and design proposals and to comment on them. This was viewed by consultees as essential to improving communications with planners and other professionals involved in the regeneration process and to building trust with agencies leading the regeneration process.

The views expressed by so many of the community consultees involved in this report resonate strongly with the findings of research on residents' views carried out in 2005. The research report "Is Anybody Listening?"¹¹ is based on interviews with 472 people. Among its findings were:

- 83% of respondents said they did not think they had a voice in decision making affecting the area;
- 80% said they did not receive enough information.

The report concluded that there was an urgent need for a review of the relationship between local people and the agencies that serve them: "this can only be achieved if there is transparency between all the actors involved; mutual respect of the rights and opinions of all; a working communication and feedback framework and a willingness to consult, debate and compromise".



5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This final section of the report:

- draws together the main findings of the consultation process;
- locates these findings within the policy context for community involvement;
- refers to examples of approaches and measures used to achieve community involvement; and
- makes recommendations on strengthening community involvement.

5.1 Findings

Strongly held and consistently expressed views emerge from the consultation with community representatives and groups:

- community involvement is not as effective as it could and should be in influencing planning and decision making and this is undermining efforts to build sustainable community ownership of the new Ballymun;
- barriers and obstacles to meaningful community engagement range from lack of trust to inadequate acknowledgement of local expertise and from poor communication on technical issues to inconsistencies in and lack of agreement on consultation processes and standards;
- the absence of support which would enable groups and representatives to fully understand technical proposals prevents the development of good communication and effective engagement.

Policy commitments have been made, at a high level, to community consultation in planning and regeneration. This includes the policies of national Government, Dublin City Council and Ballymun Regeneration Limited. However there is much more that needs to be done if these policies are to be put into practice consistently and effectively. The Active Citizenship report and the research for Combat Poverty referred to elsewhere in this report make recommendations for national and city-wide change. The Auditor General's report recommends that BRL develop a more strategic and inclusive approach to consultation which would benefit from external specialist advice.

5.2 Policy into Practice - Planning Aid and Community Planning

Planning and regeneration authorities in other countries and regions with similar policy commitments to community involvement have found it necessary to develop new approaches and resource new forms of support to make involvement a reality.

In Scotland the national Government and local authorities have developed Community Planning on a legislative basis (see section 3). As a result there are now statutory guidelines for community engagement and these are underpinned by



resources to enable communities to participate in the development of plans for their areas.

Planning Aid Scotland is supported by public funding to provide advice to individuals and groups and support and capacity building to enable communities to understand and engage with planning processes and issues. A further mechanism in Scotland to ensure delivery of policy aims is the introduction of a statutory requirement for planning authorities to implement and report on Community Participation Statements when preparing Development Plans.

In England a major reform of the planning system in recent years has included substantial Government funding since 2005 for a national network of Planning Aid services with the remit of promoting and supporting community involvement. Earlier this year additional funding was provided to enable expansion of the service. In July the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government announced a series of measures to further strengthen community involvement (see *Communities in Control - Real Power Real People: July 2008*¹²). These include a programme of support for community engagement in planning and skills development for planners.

Local authorities in some parts of England and Wales provide funding for community architecture services which support communities in both understanding architectural proposals and developing their own plans for community facilities.

In 2000 the Government in England introduced Tenant Participation Compacts to ensure tenant involvement in housing authorities' decision making and this will shortly be strengthened with a legislative 'duty to involve' on councils. Similarly in the sphere of planning the English planning authorities are now required by statute to prepare and implement a Statement of Community Involvement when developing an Area Development Plan. The Statement and its implementation is assessed at the Public Inquiry (Examination in Public) into the Plan.

In Northern Ireland the Planning Service has provided grant aid support to Community Places (formerly Community Technical Aid) to support community groups' involvement in planning since 1984. Since 2006 funding has been extended to provide a free planning advice service for individuals who cannot afford to planning consultant fees. In addition the Northern Ireland Department for Social Development grant aids a service which provides technical skills for communities developing environmental improvement projects for their areas.

5.3 Good Practice

These examples of initiatives and mechanisms for delivering policies for community involvement have four elements of good practice in common:

- high level policy commitments to community involvement;
- recognition that communities need independent professional support to participate in technical processes;
- provision of financial support to:



- enable the provision of independent professional technical support for groups; and
- develop the community involvement skills and understanding of planners and regeneration professionals;
- a requirement that planning and other agencies adopt a planned and consistent approach to community involvement.

The recommendations which follow seek to incorporate these elements of good practice into the regeneration and planning process for Ballymun.

5.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations have been designed to:

- develop more meaningful and effective community involvement in the planning and regeneration of Ballymun;
- help build the foundations for sustaining the new Ballymun;
- develop community involvement which is well informed, more strategic and consistent and on a basis understood by all involved.

(I) A Community Planning Fund should be established to provide access by community representatives and groups to professional planning, architectural and associated skills.

The **aims of the Fund** should be:

- (a) to enable the development of meaningful engagement between the community of Ballymun and the agencies involved in its planning and regeneration;
- (b) to support community representatives and groups to participate effectively and constructively in the planning and regeneration of Ballymun;
- (c) to provide independent professional technical assistance to community groups and representatives involved in planning and regeneration processes.

The indicative functions and activities which the Fund should support include:

- advice and information on planning policies and procedures;
- assistance to community groups and representatives in understanding, responding to and commenting on planning and regeneration proposals and schemes;
- support to community groups in devising design briefs for community facilities and in understanding design proposals;



- technical assistance to enable residents to provide constructive feedback to planners and architects on the design and layout of completed housing schemes;
- technical comments on issues of construction standards which are of concern to community representatives;
- training in communication and negotiation skills which is challenging for participants, draws on past experiences and builds for the future;
- support to community groups and representatives which enables them to interpret, understand and comment on the long-term community impacts of major schemes for the High Street including the new shopping complex;
- training and other support which supports the Area Forums to better plan ahead in a more co-ordinated way;
- research, workshops, conferences and publications which explore and promote good practice in Community Planning and citizenship engagement.

The Fund should be administered by the Ballymun Partnership which currently administers a range of funds for community services. The Community Advisory Group of the Partnership should develop criteria and procedures for assessing applications for support from the Fund. This Group should also determine the outcome of all applications.

Support from the Fund should be available in the form of professional services commissioned by the Fund itself and as grant aid to enable applicants to commission professional services. The criteria and procedures should provide for situations where issues require advice within a short period of time. This could be provided by the Fund establishing a call-off list of professionals. An independent advisor to the Fund should be appointed. This advisor should have experience of managing the provision of similar professional services to communities and of community engagement in planning and regeneration.

BCON and the Ballymun Partnership should apply for grant aid to establish and administer the Fund. One appropriate source of grant aid is the RAPID Programme which has demonstrated its interest in ensuring the Ballymun community has access to the professional support it needs to shape and influence planning and regeneration decision making. Other sources of funding including BRL and Dublin City Council could be considered.

(2) An agreed strategy for the co-ordination and implementation of community consultation and engagement should be developed

This recommendation is in response to the often expressed view by community consultees that it is not clear when and how and on what issues BRL will consult nor how feedback and reporting on consultation will happen. Like BRL itself these community consultees referred to many (often innovative) examples of consultation exercises and projects. However they said that it is not clear that a planned, agreed and consistent approach is in place. The Auditor General's report (2007) identifies the need for a "more strategic and inclusive approach". This recommendation is for



the development of an agreed consultation and engagement strategy by BRL in partnership with the Neighbourhood Council, BCON and Ballymun Partnership.

This new strategy should build on and learn from the good examples of community consultation that have taken place in the area and draw on models from elsewhere. It should also:

- identify the issues BRL will consult on;
- include a menu of consultation methods appropriate for different types of issue and identify those issues which require independent facilitation;
- establish minimum standards for consultation (timescales, locations, times, recording, reporting, feedback etc);
- set out how information will be provided in accessible formats which take account of equality issues and educational disadvantage;
- identify how the training needs of BRL staff involved in consultation and community involvement will be assessed and met (with timescales);
- establish procedures for monitoring, evaluation and review of the strategy by the partners.

In working together with its community partners it is envisaged that BRL will develop and test a new strategy which will act as an exemplar of good practice and set a benchmark for other regeneration initiatives both nationally and internationally.



Appendix I- Organisations and People Consulted or Interviewed

Representatives of the organisations listed below were consulted through community workshops and meetings or interviewed during the preparation of this report. In most cases more than one person from each organisation was consulted or interviewed. A group composed of representatives of the Community Action Project, the Ballymun Community Organisations Network and the Ballymun Neighbourhood Council provided liaison and information to the report author.

Ballymun Regeneration Limited

Ballymun Neighbourhood Council

Ballymun Community Organisations Network

Ballymun Partnership

Ballymun Active Disability Interest Group

Ballymun Neighbourhood Forums:

- Shangan
- Coultry
- Poppintree

Youth Action Programme

Men's Centre

Welfare Rights

Forum for Arts

Horizons

Community Action Project

RAPID

South Side Partnership

Jenny Muir (Queen's University of Belfast, Department of Environmental Planning)



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