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Sirocco Site: Community Consultation

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## 1. Introduction

Fifteen Year Old: "There's no way I'd live in London."  
Interviewer: "Why not?"  
Fifteen Year Old: "It's full of terrorists"

Ten years of relative peace has brought about an enormous change in the lives of the residents of East Belfast. People take great pride in describing how the days of bus bombings and army checkpoints in the city centre are now a thing of the past. Belfast, they say, is gradually becoming a normal city. Indeed, as the quote above illustrates, many of the younger generation have grown up knowing nothing other than peace. However, while the peace process and the ceasefires have largely stopped the extreme violence; peoples' memories of the Troubles are deep rooted. Personal memories are reproduced and become community memories. These memories, coupled with the continued and real threat of violence, affects peoples' use of space. Belfast is shaped by mental maps that divide the city into safe areas, no-go areas and ambiguous 'buffer zones'. These maps are not fixed, as understanding varies between different people and areas change according to changes of use, time of day, time of year and ongoing conflicts, projects and events. Nevertheless, it is these maps that dictate the way people move through and use the city space. Understanding how past memories and present cultures shape today's city through such maps is the key to understanding the Protestant and Catholic communities' thoughts on the Sirocco Development.

## Aims & Objectives

The overall objective of the research was:

- To look for practical ways in which the development of the site might promote the integration of the Protestant and Catholic communities who are likely to be using the site to access Belfast town centre and use some of the facilities located within it.

The aims of the consultation were to provide:

- A detailed picture of the area which demonstrates local perceptions of the space in terms of its neutrality or Catholic and Protestant identifications;
- Recommendations for Carvill e.g. Suggestions for: the layout of routes through the site, positioning of various buildings and facilities, the role of affordable units, how to avoid creating partisan symbols within the development.
- To allow an opportunity for those living within the immediate area of the Sirocco development to voice their feelings and opinions about the area in which they live and the possible impact of the development of the Sirocco site.

## Overview

A PowerPoint presentation accompanies this report and serves as an executive summary and overview of recommendations. This, more detailed, narrative report elaborates and provides more detail about the key points surmised in the accompanying presentation.

## **Consultation**

The residents from all the communities actively welcomed The Carvill Group's decision to engage in a consultation and information-gathering exercise. Many people commented that they had not heard of any other developers undertaking such a project. People were enthusiastic about the Sirocco development and were keen to share their opinions. It is important to emphasise that this consultation is only the beginning of the process. The work on the site will continue for many years to come and it is important the local communities remain engaged in the process. It is recommended that further consultation be channelled through the Inner East Belfast Interface Group – an existing discussion forum attended by a wide range of community leaders.

## **Acknowledgements**

The research team were warmly welcomed into the communities and local residents generously gave up their time and energies to accommodate the team's needs and answer their numerous questions. The team would like to extend their gratitude to those who participated in and helped with the project.

## 2. Methodology

The people living near the Sirocco Site can be broadly categorised into three groups: the predominantly Catholic community in the Short Strand, the largely Protestant community of 'Inner East Belfast', and the residents of the apartment blocks more recently built on the east and west banks of the Lagan. It is important to recognise that communities are not homogenous and do not hold a single point of view. The communities consist of multiple sub-groups who have different needs, opinions, beliefs, behaviours and characteristics. While it is impossible to talk to everyone, a range of different methodologies were used in order to ensure that as many people as possible were consulted in a variety of contexts.

- **Literature Review:** An overview of the recent literature was undertaken to provide a better understanding of the research context and to identify other innovative work that could inform the Sirocco development.
- **Design Team Alignment:** An alignment meeting was held with the design team in Belfast to clarify the goals of the research project, explore the expectations of the different stakeholders and to build a comprehensive list of specific questions that should be looked at by the research.
- **Community Leader Alignment:** Core representatives from the Inner East Belfast Interface Group were consulted during the planning phase of the research. This introductory meeting allowed the research team to outline the project's objectives and discuss the proposed methods. The community leaders' feedback provided essential guidance in terms of the feasibility of the research, logistical advice and recruitment of respondents, as well as contributing useful background knowledge and overviews of local opinions.
- **Community Leader Workshop:** A workshop was conducted with the Inner East Belfast Interface Group to get further and more detailed information and views from a wider range of community leaders. This workshop was structured around a mapping exercise that initiated further discussion about the local area, local communities, existing issues and tensions and views on the Sirocco Site and the proposed development.
- **Focus Groups:** Two focus groups (for 18-35 year olds & 35yrs+) were organised in both communities. A total of 36 people from a variety of backgrounds were consulted. The groups were, like the community leader workshop, structured around a mapping exercise and a series of open-ended questions to prompt discussions about the local area, the communities, use of space and the Sirocco Site.
- **'Days in the life of the communities':** Four 'day in the life of' studies were conducted with families and members of the two communities. This ethnographic research method involved participant observation of the communities as the researchers spend a full day with different local residents and their families. The researchers gained an understanding of real life in the area by immersing themselves and following people around as they went about their daily activities.
- **Household surveys of new developments:** A total of 26 residents of the new apartment developments on Laganbank Road and Laganside Mews were surveyed. The questionnaire investigated the demographics and make up of the households, working, shopping and socialising patterns, understandings of community and opinions of the Sirocco Site.

- **Youth Engagement Exercise:** Recognising the importance and complexity of engaging with young people, ESRO has developed a particular methodology for working with such 'hard to reach groups'. The principle of this approach is to get young people to conduct some research and at the same time discuss their own views and opinions. In this case, two groups of five young people were recruited from local youth groups. The young people attended a training workshop and then conducted a short household survey with their family, friends and neighbours. They also undertook a photo-essay, where they took photographs of things, places and spaces they felt represented their community, showed where they felt safe and unsafe, and the areas that they considered to be neutral or to have no affiliation with either the Protestant or Catholic communities. The experience of conducting the research, the findings and the young peoples' views and opinions were discussed at two debriefing meetings.

Due to the sensitivity of many of the issues that were discussed during the research, the anonymity of all of those who participated was assured and thus personal or identifying details will not be included in this report.

Those who participated in the focus groups, day in the life of studies and the young people were rewarded for their work with a financial incentive from the Carvill Group. Donations were also made to those community groups who assisted in the research.

### 3. Background and Literature Review<sup>1</sup>

From a brief overview of the literature that looks at some of the issues in East Belfast, we have drawn out 6 key themes which also inform the ways in which we present the results of the fieldwork outlined in this report. Each theme is a broad category which itself could be subdivided into other areas. Some of the sub-themes are arguably as important as those which we have identified as 'key'. This review serves merely as an introduction to the kinds of issues which were explored during research and which have relevance to any attempt to understand local lives in Belfast. Each of the authors we discuss here has published extensively on the subject and the articles, chapters and books we cite here could serve as jump off points for further desk and library based research. We should also acknowledge the Institute of Conflict Research, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and The Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (and their journal 'Shared Space') amongst others (listed in the bibliography below) as good starting points for anyone interested in reading further.

#### Residential Segregation

The theme of residential segregation of Protestant and Catholic communities in Belfast is as recurrent in the literature as it is obvious to the naked eye on the city's landscape. For some, the fact of sectarian segregation has been as important a factor in the continuance of violence and trouble in the city as the history, ideology or politics which determine where lines are drawn:

"Just as one cannot hope to understand the Northern Ireland conflict without an acquaintance with its history, it is impossible to appreciate its pervasiveness without some knowledge of the background, extent and effect of **residential segregation between Catholics and Protestants. This is both the cause and consequence of the province's history of turbulence.**" (Darby , 1976) [emphasis added]

For Darby then, segregation moves beyond the simple consequence of two feuding communities wanting to be separated from each other and becomes the very perpetuating factor behind the feuding itself. As Shirlow and Murtagh pointed out much later, the point still applies.

"The perpetuation of ethno-sectarian conflict within Northern Ireland and elsewhere, reminds us that despite the onset of globalisation, cultural homogenisation and mass consumption **the links between ethno-sectarianism and residential separation remain central to the logic and explanation of violent enactment** and cultural polarisation" (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006). [emphasis added]

These writers look closely at the ways in which segregation itself leads to violence through various mechanisms of contested space and perceived differences in identity which are conceived through a history of conflict. These may include constructed difference (Shirlow, 2003), studied ignorance of the 'other side' (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006) and the potential for 'place' to become a signifier of identities which reinforce the historical conflict more generally

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<sup>1</sup> This is not a full or exhaustive literature review in the academic sense. Rather the selection of articles represents an overview of the kinds of studies which inform current understandings of the cultural context in which this research project took place. It should also be remembered that the research which informs this report was carried out with the express purpose of trying to understand how the tensions and divisions between communities in East Belfast might impact upon the development of the 'Sirocco site' on the Eastern bank of the Lagan river and to understand how to avoid creating any further potential for flashpoints or tensions within the site.

e.g. 'Irish' vs. 'British' identities becoming associated with residential areas (Byrne, Hanssen and Bell, 2006). It is important then, to recognise that segregation may be more than just a geographical fact which can be mapped but rather a tool or potential source of local perceptions and understandings of the world in which they live more broadly. For most of the writers, residential segregation and the way in which areas become identified with either Catholics or Protestants is the single biggest factor in determining the segregation, tensions and fears that still exist within Belfast.

## Symbols

A walk through the streets which surround the Sirocco site would leave a visitor in little doubt that symbols and slogans play an important role in the spaces people move through and live in, in East Belfast. Whether it be the 30 foot 'peace line' which dissects Madrid Street, not along the natural line of the road but at sharp right angles to it, or the freshly painted sectarian murals or even the nationalist and loyalist flags which hang from windows and flagpoles on the outside of houses. The symbols are hard to avoid.

The history and complex meanings of many of the symbols are too many and various to go into in any great detail here. Examples include:

- Flags (national and local)
- Murals (historical, sectarian, aggressive or educative)
- Memorials (both to long past historical events and more recent memorials to victims of the troubles)
- Sports (colours, badges, matches, grounds and teams)
- Buildings, shops, businesses and even street furniture can be seen as marking barriers or borders which would be quite invisible to the casual observer
- Maps
- Names
- Cult figures and heroes (e.g. George Best)
- Events and dates

Inevitably this list would prove to be incomplete. Symbols are not always associated with sectarianism or difference but they can be appropriated into sectarian language, such as the colours and badges of football teams. Indeed, streets or street names, invisible barriers along streets or kerbstones for example, can provide some of the most compelling meanings to residents of certain areas (Bairner, 2006). These are appropriations of existing objects into the symbolic world of the local residents. Some markings are clearly designed and placed to territorialise, such as national flags and sectarian slogans in graffiti (Byrne, Hanssen and Bell, 2006). Others, like memorials, seem to perform many roles at once: to memorialise, to mark space, remind of divisions, enshrine ethnic, religious or sectarian difference and even speak of shame, fear and continuing hopelessness (Leonard, 1997). Yet other symbols can become beacons of hope for a united future such as the Odyssey entertainment complex (Bairner, 2006). Interwoven in the physical space are the symbolic importances and values attached to certain dates and events or rituals (such as marches) which seem to advance and recede in importance throughout the year turning spaces into temporarily more fearful 'zones' as tensions rise (Jarman, 2006). Every day and every space has the potential to become stigmatised in this way by the occurrence of a new event. May 11<sup>th</sup> for example, has begun to be seen as a fearful time by those who witnessed the troubles on the East Belfast interfaces in 2002 (Byrne, 2005).



## **Movement**

In a space and geography replete with so many meanings and memories it is inevitable that people's movements are affected; or rather, people will inevitably move in accordance with the way they see their immediate environment.

Shirlow and Murtagh (2006) discuss this issue at some length in their book "Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City". They surveyed many people living in East Belfast in the very communities with which this report is concerned. Many of their findings were replicated during our own study.

They find that the relative proximity of various shops and services to people's homes is a relatively unimportant factor in determining the majority of people's decisions about where to shop and where to go. They show that people from both Protestant and Catholic communities will travel many miles out of their way in order to avoid places which they perceive to be unsafe. Who is the more affected will depend on the specific geography of the different parts of the city. In the Ardoyne area which the authors deal with most extensively, it is found that the average distance travelled for basic shops and services is vastly greater for the Protestant community than the Catholic one, since the shops are perceived as being owned by Catholics or within Catholic territory. The opposite is the case for the Short Strand Catholic community in East Belfast for whom local shops and services are mostly in Protestant territory. People from these communities will travel many miles across Belfast to find shops and services in neutral spaces or in (what Shirlow calls) 'co-religionist' areas.

Essentially the arguments boil down to the fact that the perception of places as 'safe' or 'unsafe', as 'belonging' to one side or another or of being behind certain perceived barriers, all affect the ways in which people move around the city.

Of course, people still need to move. Routes themselves, which may otherwise have been unaffected by the territorial power of residential spaces, can become stigmatised as Catholic or Protestant routes. Often the routes themselves then become marked with symbols (Bairner, 2006). One example of this, again not visible to the naked eye or casual observer, but identified within this report, would be the Albert Bridge. The bridge provides a main route into the city centre from East Belfast. Since it is close to the Catholic Short Strand and to Protestant communities to the South; so the Northern side has become Catholic and the southern side Protestant. Many locals are very careful to remain on 'their own' side until the neutral space of the city centre has been reached.

## **Violence and Tension**

Violence and tension have been examined in a number of ways. Again the full scope and complexity of the issue as discussed in the literature is far beyond the scope of this review. What follows merely highlights some work and some paths to follow.

Some writers have discussed the physical and psychological effects of violence both in terms of the lasting scars on the landscape (shops with metal windows or burned out shells of cars and buildings) and on the people of Belfast themselves. Many people have lost their lives on the streets of Belfast and many more live with grief. Others have been injured physically or psychologically by memories of violence and horrific events. Shirlow and Murtagh talk of a kind

of perpetual 'victimhood' which perpetuates the division between communities by constantly demanding that past violent wrongs are righted (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006).

For the purposes of this review however it is important to note two themes in particular. The first is the *location* of violence and the second is the effect that a fear of or *threat* of violence has on the local population's perception of the space in which they live.

Traditionally violence is associated with 'interface' areas which are commonly understood as being the points at which two working class areas of opposing ethnic-political-religious communities (i.e. Protestants and Catholics, Loyalists and Nationalists etc.) meet. Such interfaces are often marked by 'peacelines' or a saturation of symbols, such as murals. These can all serve to create the sense that they are places of tension and contestation. Jarman (2004) argues however, that this definition needs to be conceived more broadly, following evidence of new 'interfaces' or 'flashpoints'. He argues that it would be better to see interfaces as those places and spaces which are "dominated, contested or claimed by some or all members of the differing ethno-national groups". This definition opens up the possibility for a lot more places to become potential sites of violence within Belfast. It is a concept we discuss more below.

As Shirlow points out this fact is made more complex by the fact that for many there is a threat of violence which is seen as emanating from people and places (Shirlow, 2003). For many young men, for example, it is the fear of violence or physical threat that stops them from crossing borders into the 'other' community. They fear being recognised and they fear being beaten. Such fears, Shirlow argues, become articulated through narratives and collective memories of previous violence which serve to reignite divisions and perpetuate the notion of 'war' between the two communities. Even for those who do cross boundaries (women, children and the elderly) a fear of violence can be present and manifest (Byrne, 2005). Some of the most recent sectarian violence in Belfast has been in East Belfast precisely where this study took place and these issues are still particularly salient for many of the residents.

O'Halloran, Shirlow and Murtagh (2004) identify four types of violence; all of which have unique ways of threatening a community and of potentially causing wider conflicts:

1. 'Recreational' youth led violence, youths from further a-field are attracted to fewer adult checks and balances on behaviour in interfaces, this violence rebounds onto interface communities
2. Event-linked violence: summer as "mad season" parade and protest-related
3. Casual proximity violence: passers by, especially after a night out
4. Orchestrated and premeditated interface violence associated with paramilitaries

As both Jarman and Shirlow conclude; the threat of violence, memories of violence, the potential for violence and the relatively low incidence of (nonetheless shocking) real episodes of violence, all interact together to inform people's understanding of a space. That the threat of violence is often a myth does not stop people feeling fearful. It is also worth noting that during periods of violence or tension, 'communities' which once may have been defined by family and friends and institutions become dominated by paramilitaries and outside actors. The influencers and power brokers change. People living in the communities become subjugated to these forces. Thus, in a very real sense, the community changes during periods of violence. Its structures and realities change meaning making it difficult to study this period from within a time of relative calm.

## Mixing and Neutrality

In Belfast there are a number of residential communities which are identified as 'mixed' which means simply that both Catholics and Protestants live there and that the site is not claimed by one side or another and nor is it a contested space over which one side stakes a claim.

Shirlow argues that for many of the 78% of Belfast residents who do not live in mixed areas, there is no desire to mix (Shirlow, 2006) and that mixed spaces are not an aspiration. His argument is based on the power of residential segregation and its association with the narratives of difference and grievance. But the picture seems a little more complex than that. In fact, middle class areas tend to be mixed and as such an aspiration to wealth and larger properties in middle class areas could be seen as an aspiration to escape segregation. Further, as upward social mobility has increased, so have the number of 'mixed' middle class areas (Jarman, 2004). Mullan (1995) warns however that just because an area is mixed this does not mean that there are no tensions at all and, like Jarman, suggests that where a mixed area acts as a buffer between two sectarian residential zones then that buffer zone has the potential to become an 'interface'. Hansson and Byrne (2006) find, further, that 'mixed' communities are often less 'mixed' and more 'neutral', in the sense that people from different community backgrounds still do not share community or social life with those from the opposing background. Instead they tacitly agree to live together in a non-sectarian (or 'neutral') space.

Despite the clear borders which can exist around residential communities, many people do cross them and travel into territory belonging to the other side. The people who do this tend to follow certain demographic patterns; the young, women and the elderly. For these groups the threat of violence is less of a deterrent than for young men (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006). This does not mean that no one from these demographic populations feels any fear or taboo when crossing borders of course. Women may cross borders to go shopping, children may cross them to get to schools and meet friends and the elderly may cross them to attend community meetings or groups.

Neutral spaces make mixing far more likely and the identification of neutral space, to some extent, makes living *possible* in Belfast. The City Centre is identified as neutral and as such, people from both communities will feel comfortable there; at least in terms of sectarian troubles. Neutrality, however, is not an uncontested term and there are more than one type of neutral space (discussed further below).

Activities such as cross-community youth groups, sports and especially work can all contribute to creating mixed situations and to interaction between people from both sides. Work in particular, can be seen as a neutralising activity. The common need for jobs and employment and current employment practises which sees big firms and projects employing equally from each community means that in a sense, work is sacrosanct and not any longer subject to so much sectarian angst. However, and this is important, a perception that work places 'belong' to one side or the other *will* lead to a refusal to seek employment with that firm by members of the other side (O'Halloran, Shirlow and Murtagh, 2004).

## Peace

For some of the writers, the possibility of peace still seems a very long way off. Shirlow and Murtagh seem to suggest that no matter the efforts of those interested in cross-community projects or the changing demographics of the city, those who perpetuate the conflict will hold

sway. They see a kind of cyclical form to the conflict in which division and conflict are woven into the culture of the way people live and that peace is not yet achievable.

Other literature and evidence tends to contradict their view in so far as it is clear that since the peace process began, tensions have receded and the sociology of places in Northern Ireland like Belfast, have changed. Intercommunity and cross-community projects can now talk meaningfully about having policies of best practise and employing tried and tested methodologies which at the very least have lead to a more peaceful situation (Jarman, 2006). At the time of writing, voting is about to begin for the Northern Ireland Assembly (March 2007) and BBC reports are daring to discuss the possibility of voting which is non-sectarian. No one pretends that sectarianism, violence, and tension have disappeared or are even close to disappearing in Northern Ireland but Belfast *is* changing as the very development of the Sirocco site suggests.

# Research Findings

## 4. Movement around the current Sirocco site

### The Catholic Short Strand Community

The movements of the residents of the Short Strand are amongst the most striking features of the sectarian divide in East Belfast. The Short Strand is an 'island' community, surrounded on almost every side by Protestant communities. This presents some logistical problems for the residents. The map below shows the borders of the Short Strand on a map. Residents of the Short Strand identify all of the residential areas to the immediate North, South and East of the Short Strand as 'Protestant'. Currently the Western side of the Short Strand is the Sirocco site which is seen as neutral.

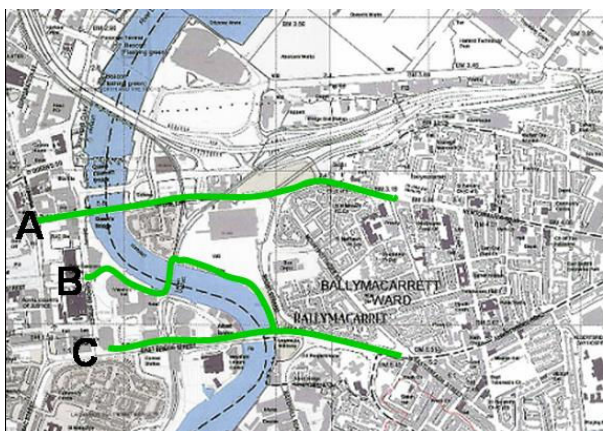
Along the Eastern edge of the Short Strand is the 'peaceline' which divides the communities. The wall dissects some streets right across the middle like a scar and was recently built as high as nearby houses after violence erupted at Cluan Place. Cluan Place is at the interface of the two communities at the South East corner of the Short Strand.



The Short Strand is an 'island' community in East Belfast surrounded by Protestant communities

The diagram below shows the walking routes which residents of the Short Strand feel safe using when travelling to work, going shopping or meeting friends and socialising. It is immediately apparent that all of the walking routes which are considered safe lead straight into the city centre. There are none which indicate a safe route East, North or South into 'Protestant areas'. Each of these walking routes also has its own features. Route A (over Queen's Bridge and along the Newtonards road) is seen as neutral. This means that the route is shared with Protestants. The Newtonards road has been seen in the past as one of the more dangerous interfaces for the residents of East Belfast and some recent troubles have occurred there. Indeed the Northern end of the Short Strand is walled off and houses are invisible to someone walking along the Newtonards road. Route B is seen by residents of the Short Strand as neutral and very definitely 'safe' though this is slightly contradicted by the Protestant view outlined elsewhere. Route C is, on the face of it, another shared route. However along route C Catholics will stay on the North side of the road until reaching the Western side of the Albert Bridge whilst Protestants will stay on the South side. There is also a walkway on the Western bank of the river running south from Route C. Residents of the Short Strand call this 'The Second Walkway'

and it is identified as Catholic and therefore safe for them, but, they will stay on the North side of the Albert bridge until reaching the Western side and crossing to use this walkway.



The safe walking routes which are clearly defined as safe all lead from the neutral city centre to the Short Strand and not further towards the East.

These routes will be seen by all Short Strand residents as safe. It would not be true to say however that no one crosses the borders and heads East or South or North. Women, children and older people all do walk along other routes through East Belfast. When doing so however, they will stick mainly to main roads and to say that they feel 'safe' would perhaps be a step too far. How people feel about doing this is largely a personal story. One young mother who had lost family members to sectarian violence, found herself unable to use any but the routes identified as safe above. And personal recollections made even the use of Route A difficult. In contrast, an older retired man confidently strode up the Newtonards road and demonstrated to the researcher that he was known by shop-owners even in Protestant 'territory'. He attended groups for retired men and men's health groups. Many women in the Short Strand also do use the shopping facilities at Connswater and will travel there on foot by walking up the Albert Bridge Road (very few will use the Newtonards road, pasted as it is, with loyalist murals). Interestingly, those who did and those who didn't move into 'Protestant territory' were completely unaware of the actions of each other. This suggests that many of these 'rules' about where to go and how to get there are unspoken, tacit rules.



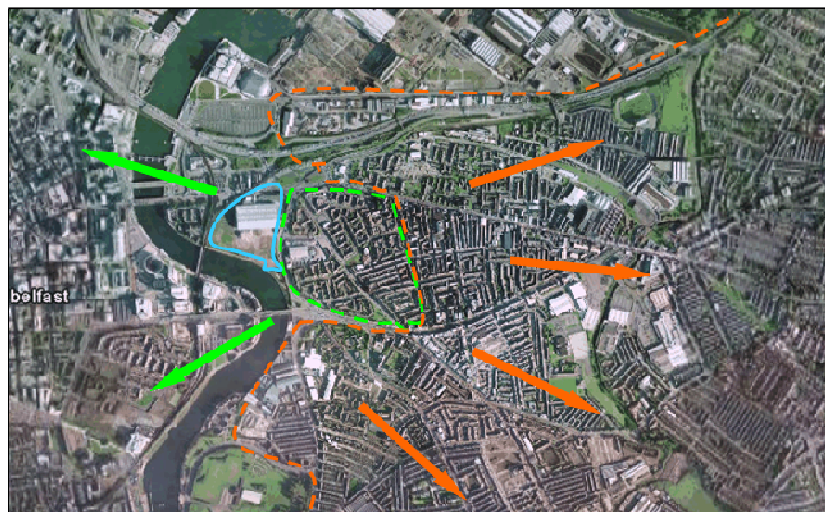
The barriers on the North side of the Short Strand community, along the Newtonards Road make the houses and occupants invisible.

Walking then, is an option which can involve long trips out of the way. The most local shops and facilities to the Short Strand go unused and much longer trips are made to avoid crossing

borders. Furthermore, routes are far from random. They are planned and thought about. Residents would not like to find themselves on the wrong side of a perceived border by accident and were able to point out on maps many of the borders and zones of parts of Belfast which were a long way from the Short Strand.

## The Protestant Communities

The fact that the Protestant community are the majority in East Belfast, results in a very different use of space and patterns of movement around the city to their neighbours in the Short Strand. While, as we have seen, the Catholic community has a clear preference of crossing the river to socialise and shop in other Catholic areas or the neutral area of the city centre, the Protestant community is far more content staying within ‘their’ area of East Belfast. Rather than cross the river, the Protestant community have the services, shops, leisure centres, schools and pubs on their doorstep. For example, people are able to shop in local convenience shops along the Newtonards Road, Woodstock Road, Castleraigh Street, Albertbridge Road and Beersbridge Road – all of which lead away from the Sirocco Site – as well as the larger shopping centres and supermarkets at Connswater or Knochagoney. Thus, the majority of the Protestant movement is not westwards across the river, but eastwards to the rest of East Belfast. While the Catholic community would prefer to cross the river to, for example, shop at Yorkgate, the Park centre or in the city centre. The diagram below illustrates this point.



The primary directions of movement of the Protestant and Catholic communities of Inner East Belfast

Although it is true that much of the non-work movement within the Protestant Communities is concentrated in East Belfast, this is by no means to say that people do not use the city centre or cross the river. They do. However, this journey involves moving out of the comfort zone of their ‘own’ communities and passing the Catholic dominated Short Strand area. The research indicated a high preference for the use of private cars or taxis when travelling out of these comfort zones, especially after dark. Pedestrian routes were quite clearly defined and adhered to. The map below indicates the main routes into Belfast City centre from the Protestant areas.



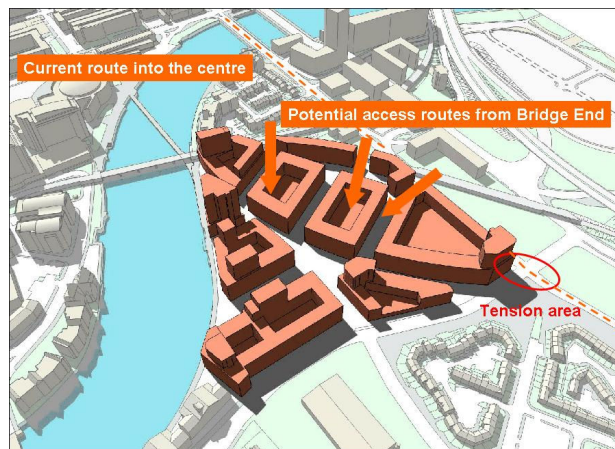
Protestant access routes to the City Centre

The diagram clearly demonstrates that the Protestant routes into the city centre are over the Albertbridge (interestingly always using the southern side of the road as the northern side is considered Catholic) and the Queens Bridge from Newtonards Road. The diagram also indicates the areas of particular tension where these routes come into closest contact with the Catholic community: at the Mountpottinger Road and Albertbridge Road intersection, at the Short Strand intersections with the Albertbridge Road and the Newtonards Road. While there have not been any significant disturbances at these interfaces for some time, there is clear sense of fear felt by people from the Protestant communities. When walking past these with people, they would become nervous and, despite wanting to appear confident, would do everything they could to hurry past and not linger. The whole area is considered a no-go zone, including the east bank of the Lagan. One young woman, walking from her house south of the Woodstock Road Link to the Odyssey Leisure centre, crossed over the Albert bridge, walked along the riverside walkway on the west side of the river and then crossed back over to the east on the Queens Bridge – a route indicated on the diagram – to avoid walking through the Catholic area, despite this being a far more direct route.

This has clear implications in terms of the Protestant communities accessing the Sirocco Site. Currently, people will not cross these tension areas for any reason. Therefore they will not feel comfortable accessing the site from the South. Rather, they would prefer emphasis on an entrance coming from the Bridge End side (see diagram below).

This of course, is the *current* understanding of space and areas. The scale of the Sirocco development could perhaps result in a gradual change of behaviour. While the seemingly direct route provided by the development (cutting through the new site and across a new bridge) might appear to be the logical way into the city centre, it must be emphasised that any changes in behaviour and understandings of space would necessarily be gradual as the memories and fears are deep-rooted and taken very seriously.





Potential access routes from Bridge End

In addition to the day to day movements around the site, concerns were raised by the community leaders about how the proposed development will affect the marching route along the Newtonards Road. The community leaders were anxious that the site will not create another or a larger interface in Belfast. These concerns have been fed into the design process and assurances were given by the Carvill Group that ground level residential properties will not overlook the route. Continued consultation with the Inner East Belfast Interface Group will be essential to ensure that community concerns are raised and addressed before they develop into issues.

## Cars

To some extent then, walking can be stressful if it is on any but a prescribed set of 'safe' routes. It also severely restricts movement. Cars, on the other hand, provide a kind of bubble of safety. This was a view shared by both Catholics and Protestants. Roads which would be fearsome to approach by foot become entirely safe to navigate in a car. For example, many of the Catholic women who would not set foot on the Albert Bridge east of the peaceline, would happily *drive* the same way to Connswater shopping centre. Men however would still be deterred by the fact that the shopping centre is perceived as lying in 'enemy' territory. Similarly most Protestants of East Belfast could not even consider the prospect of walking into the Mountpottinger Road but would certainly drive along it, through the middle of the Short Strand.

## Buses

Buses remain a negotiated space, neither entirely comfortable nor necessarily uncomfortable. The Metro bus number 5 exemplifies the issue. The bus comes from Protestant East Belfast, up the Mountpottinger Road through the middle of the Short Strand community and over the Queen's Bridge into the city centre. The bus is full of Protestants from East Belfast as it passes through the Short Strand who would not walk up the same street. Similarly it can carry people from the Short Strand out further East through Belfast's suburbs along roads which they would never walk down.

But the issue is not as simple as it seems. There is a fear among people of a bus that comes along which is full only of 'them'uns', even if that bus were in 'their' territory. Furthermore, people share stories of trouble on the buses, even if only as serious as an insult being thrown. Bus stops are also routinely vandalised. Furthermore, people will go a long way out of their way

to only stand at bus stops associated with residential territory in which they feel safe. The most serious issue with using the bus though is the issue of being 'seen' and known whilst outside of 'safe' territory. This is dealt with in the next section.

## Being Seen

By far the biggest issue which lies behind the way in which people move and the routes and methods they chose is the issue of 'being seen'. The main fear that people have is that they have been seen coming out of their residential area and moving into the other side. This would mean that they could be identified as Catholic whilst in Protestant area and that this might provoke insult or abuse, even violence. A man in his thirties said that he could not go further than the borders of the Short Strand into East Belfast because he feared being recognised and set upon. Even recognition by people who were his work colleagues, he said, could lead to some nastier types coming after him. He simply did not want people to be able to identify him as a Catholic in Protestant East Belfast.

This fear is almost universal amongst all demographic groups. And has some shocking consequences. The idea of being seen leaving one's own community and entering the other can cause some radical and extreme avoidance measures. For young men this can be as extreme as being unwilling to move from one side of a road to another a distance of perhaps 10 feet. The fear when asked to try and cross the road, for one young man, was palpable. He categorically refused to try and was visibly shaken at the prospect. The street he would not cross was less than 100 metres from his own front door<sup>2</sup>.

Another older man, who was prepared to venture outside of the borders of the Short Strand, said that he felt fear when passing a certain Lamp-post at the corner of Mountpottinger road and the Albert Bridge Road. Passing the lamp post takes a Short Strand Resident out of the Short Strand and past the Protestant Cluan place, the site of the troubles in 2002. The extent to which a micromanagement of space takes place by locals at ground level, no matter how trivial a distance can look on a map, must not be underestimated. This point is explored in its implications for the Sirocco development in the section about Protestant East Belfast below.



The borders which many will not cross can be only as thick as a lamppost

The issue of being seen presents one of the largest problems for the development of the Sirocco site. It is likely that, at least for an initial period, Protestants will not use entrances to the site from the South or the East because it would mean them being seen crossing Catholic

<sup>2</sup> The road in question was Bryson Street. The man would not cross on to the Eastern side at its Northern end and would certainly not have crossed over to the Northern side of the Newtonards Road.

borders. Similarly there will be issues with people being seen using these entrances and therefore identifiable as Catholic or Protestant. This creates the potential for fear and tension. In the presentation which accompanies this document we lay out suggestions of ways to lessen this problem through the creation of mini-centres between the centre of the site and the entrances. This would make movement to and from the entrances less immediately identifiable with the residential areas behind them.

## 5. Mixing and Neutrality

As might be expected from the findings above, there are people within the East Belfast communities whose social world is fully contained within the borders of the community. There are some for whom the centre of their neighbourhoods are a haven from both bad memories at the borders and perceived danger outside. For those who have lost family or whose lives have been affected by violence, the desire to explore the possibilities of living in a mixed community or sharing space is perhaps not likely in the short term. For others however, mixing and crossing borders is already a daily occurrence.

Community leaders actively engage in cross-community projects and many are determined to break down the borders and boundaries between the two communities. They see the only peaceful future for Belfast as being defined by two communities mixing and being able to communicate with each other. Much of the focus from the community leaders is on the young whom they see as being the key to the future and indeed speaking to young people, it becomes clear quickly that they do not have clear ideas of 'the other side' in the same way that older people do. Young people tend to be very aware of the boundaries and the symbols and even which places belong to them and which don't but they are nowhere near as fearful of their contemporaries on the other sides of these borders. This is by no means to say that there are not sectarian disputes among teenagers it is simply to say that their discourses and narratives do not seem as fixed or certain when speaking of difference as those of older people. Awareness of this is also reflected in the ways that the older generations, and especially the community leaders, talk about young people. The fights and arguments that occur between teenagers of 'opposing' sides at the interfaces are seen as nothing but 'kids' stuff<sup>3</sup>.

The innocence of youth in this regard is even sometimes admired as well as being dismissed. One mother proudly spoke of her children going into town and being able to mix with people of 'both religions'. She felt that this was a positive situation and lamented her own inability to mix more. Older generations remember too the troubles caused by relationships or marriage between Catholics and Protestants but current attitudes reflect a softening in attitude and in practise. Respondents were aware that there were perhaps seven or eight Protestants living within the Short Strand who were married to Catholics and many Catholics married to Protestants in the rest of East Belfast. People were sure that these families experienced no prejudice, even during the troubles of 2002. Whether this is true or not cannot be verified here, but it is important to note that at least the 'ideal' was that mixing *could* happen, even if it was more a matter of tolerance than desire.

In the Short Strand there is also an understanding, perhaps guided most strongly by the community leaders, that the Sirocco site will be a mixed site. Leaders express that the site *should* be mixed and that this very fact would itself make the Sirocco site somewhat of a positive step. Others express in slightly more reserved terms that the site *will* be mixed, because this is the way Belfast is being shaped. All understand that if the site is going to be predominantly 'middle class' or 'yuppie' then mixing is an inevitability. No one expressed any feelings that this, in itself, would be a bad thing.

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that the leaders do not see the importance of heading off violence between youngsters before families and friends get involved. It has been well noted that troubles often start with tensions between youngsters. Here we are simply talking about the way in which people talk about and understand these issues.

The Protestant communities did not consider it likely that the Sirocco Site would become a mixed residential development. This is because they already consider the site to be a Catholic area and at present could not imagine themselves living there.

There were clear areas of Belfast that both the Catholic and Protestant communities considered to be neutral. The city centre is largely considered to be neutral territory, although specific bars and clubs were aligned in terms of the sectarian divide. The Odyssey Leisure Complex is also considered to be a neutral venue. This is partly due to the strict security enforcement of the no football paraphernalia or visible tattoo policy and also because it mainly appeals to younger people who, as we have mentioned elsewhere, are happier mixing with other than the older generations<sup>4</sup>. The third area which is considered as neutral space are the 'yuppie' flats and middle class new developments, largely because the residents are not considered as part of the troubles.

It is important to note that the Sirocco Site is likely to become associated with, if not part of, the city centre. The site is on the riverside and the new development will overlook the river and face the existing centre. The city centre itself is beginning to encompass the west bank of the Lagan and if the Sirocco site fully exploits its river side location, this will simply spread across the river. The new bridge will be key to this, as it will facilitate movement back and forth. The tall dense buildings planned for the Sirocco site are also of the type people associate with the city centre. It is also the case that the existing residents of the new developments on the east bank of the river refer to where they live as part of the city centre.

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to argue that there are no problems around the Odyssey Centre. There are often fights and minor scuffles in the car park and where people wait for taxis. However, these problems are considered to be the 'normal' antisocial behaviour that occurs in most towns and cities caused by young people consuming excessive amounts of alcohol.

## 6. Some Senses of Community and Residential Segregation

### Catholic Short Strand Community Space and Symbols

The Short Strand community, due to its geographic isolation and the barriers along its boundaries is a space which looks in on itself. It is not surprising that identity markers can be found in the interior as well as at the edges. In fact, whilst Protestant murals and slogans face on to the Short Strand from, say, the Newtonards road, the majority of the murals which define Catholic identity would only be seen after entering the space of the Short Strand fully.



These murals lie in the interior of the Short Strand reminding residents of their identity on a daily basis

Whilst the murals tend to confirm a politicised and ethnic identity generated from within, the Short Strand also contains visual reminders that this has been a community under siege, at times defined by outside influences and 'invaders' as much as from within.



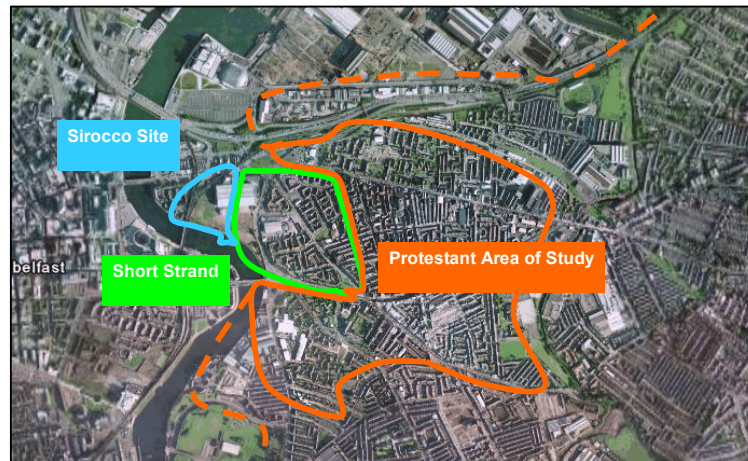
The police station is the largest building within the borders of the short Strand community and the peaceline towers above homes.

These kinds of visual symbols help to create a sense of the space as not only self contained but one which has a shared identity and a shared social life. Although there currently is much discourse amongst residents about wasteful youth and the influence of drug addicts on the streets, there is also very much a sense that these streets belong to them and that anywhere within the Short Strand is part of the same community; their community. People routinely left front doors open, kept personal belongings on the streets and pavements in front of their houses and lived within walking distance of close family. In this sense at least, we are talking about a unified space. It is perhaps for these reasons of insularity and inward-looking space, that the residents lay no territorial claim to spaces outside of the community (such as the Sirocco site).

## Protestant Community and Communities

While the Catholic Community in the Short Strand is relatively easily geographically defined, this is not the case for the Protestant Community. Most of East Belfast is a Protestant area and the Short Strand is the one enclave of Catholic residents. It is not possible to talk about the Protestant Community of East Belfast as a single community, rather we must consider there to be multiple *communities*.

The diagram below demonstrates the problem. The Short Strand is high-lighted in green. The dotted orange line shows that the rest of East Belfast is populated largely by Protestants. In terms of the limiting the study area, it was decided that we should focus on those people living closest to the Sirocco Site, illustrated with the solid orange line.



This study area turned out, as one might expect, to be an arbitrary line on the map. People living East Belfast are not constrained to specific areas: they move around freely, using services where and when they want to. For example, the youth project we worked with was situated within our defined study area, but young people were coming in from as far away as Dundonald to participate in its activities.

Although there is no overarching sense of a single Protestant Community of East Belfast, there is very strong local community cohesion. People felt safe in their neighbourhoods because they were surrounded by their families and people they knew. Doors were left unlocked when people went out and while walking around people frequently bumped into friends and relatives, stopping to pass the time of day and catch up on gossip.

Families, and particularly young families, were considered important in not only building communities, but defusing tensions. One clear example of this was reported by residents of Cluan Place, a renowned flash point as it is on the interface line between the Catholic and Protestant communities. Residents reported that since young families had moved in, they were able to pressure people to stop playing antagonising music across the peace wall during the marching season, for example, on the grounds that young kids were now playing in the street and they could be hit by any missiles that might be hurled over the wall in response to the music. Having young families within the community clearly helped to dissipate tensions.



Young families help build local community spirit and help defuse tensions in renowned trouble spots

Just as murals and symbolism were important to the Catholic communities, the same is true with the Protestant communities of East Belfast. However, while the murals in the Short Strand were all within the residential area, those in the Protestant communities were both inward focused and outward looking. This corresponds to the idea that the Protestant communities are the more confident majority on the East side of the river.

Interestingly, with the peace process and ceasefires, the types of murals in East Belfast are changing to be less aggressive. Residents describe and point out that many of the older murals that represented paramilitaries dressed in balaclavas are being replaced with more historical images. These more historical murals display the Protestant communities' pride in their working class background, the industrial heritage of the city (as in many cases it was only the Protestants who could get jobs in the factories and shipyards), and Protestant history. It is important to note, however, that although the symbols are becoming 'softer' they carry the same meaning: this is *Protestant* East Belfast.



The images used in murals in Protestant East Belfast are gradually being 'softer', as there is a move away from the images of paramilitaries towards images of historical figures and Belfast's Protestant industrial heritage



## 7. Understandings of the Sirocco Site

### Catholic View

The Sirocco site lies on the western edge of the area defined as the Short Strand.

The site currently has two main roles in Short Strand Life. The first is as a place for teenagers to get away from adults at night or at the weekend; the second comes from the small earning potential generated by a car park at the Northern edge of the site. This serves as a car park for those wishing to travel into the centre of Belfast. It is a business which is owned and run by people living in the Short Strand.

The name Sirocco does not in any way conjure fond memories for those on the Short Strand. For some, the name no longer means anything at all in fact. It is simply the name for a place – no more or less evocative than any other. There are others however, for whom the name does have meaning. There are many who remember when houses used to exist on the Western side of the Short Strand which were part of the Short Strand community. Quin Street, for example, was a cul-de-sac of Catholic houses that simply no longer exists. These houses were all located on land which is now part of the Sirocco site. Older women express concern that during their lifetime the Short Strand community has been made smaller (i.e. lost houses) despite the growing need for housing. One woman's sense of loss raises immediate sympathy from others: "We used to have all this [indicating on a map that the Short Strand used to encompass part of the Sirocco site and housing which used to be where the flyover at Bridge end is] but we lost all of these houses and the families all moved away."

For others, Sirocco itself represents a more malevolent time. A man in his late sixties who has lived for all of his life in the Short Strand, for example, said that the Sirocco works were an 'interloper'. He remembers well the fact that jobs in the factories were reserved for Protestant men.

"There we were," he remembers, "All looking for work. And there were all these jobs on our doorstep. But we had to go and find work elsewhere. I was an engineer, perfectly qualified for work in there. But in the end I had to find work miles away."

This point was further compounded by a memory of the placement of a Sirocco workshop within the confines of the Short Strand community itself, which also provided employment mainly to Protestant men.

But there are, in fact, people in the Short Strand who have worked in the Sirocco site: Women. As one respondent said:

"Protestant men worked Sirocco in the day and Catholic women cleaned it at night."

During the research, the question of whether women having worked in the Sirocco works might have led to any attachment to the site was followed up. The responses were uniform. The cleaning jobs were not regarded with much pride by the women who had done them, nor were they seen as providing any kind of economic fillip to the area. Instead, the fact that Catholic women worked in the Sirocco works only seemed to compound the memory that no men were able to work there.

For younger people, unburdened by the divisive memories of the Sirocco works, the site has become a potential 'playground'. It is somewhere that teenagers use to get away from the authority of parents and adults. As such Sirocco – for them – is a place to drink and hang out. With regard to the development of the site it is hard to see any great complaint if the name of the site were changed, from the perspective of the Short Strand community.

It is worth noting, in contrast with the findings from other East Belfast communities, that those who live in the Short Strand do not feel any sense of ownership of Sirocco per se. Its image as an interloper perhaps confirms the notion that it kept Catholics out rather than anything else. Even, the teenagers who now use the site do not lay claim to it in a sectarian sense. They see it as neutral space.

### Protestant View

The site is perceived by the Protestant communities as being in the Catholic 'zone of influence'. As discussed above, people went to great pains to avoid walking anywhere near it because it was considered part of the Catholic area.



The Sirocco Site is current considered to be part of the Catholic area

This understanding mainly stems for the geographic situation of the Sirocco works. If we return to the maps above, it is clear that the site is so close to the Short Strand and is not accessible from any of the Protestant routes into the centre. Several people mentioned that part of the site had been a Catholic residential street until these houses were demolished to allow the Sirocco works to expand. The current use of the site as a car park is managed by the Catholic community centre and this only serves to support the Protestant communities' view.

In terms of the Sirocco Brand, the Sirocco name holds little significance for the younger generations of the Protestant communities of East Belfast. Nearly all of the younger people were unaware of the location when it was referred to as the 'Sirocco Site', and could only picture it when it was described to them in relation to the Waterfront Hall, Short Strand and the two bridges crossing the Lagan. When this was explained to them, they were still unable to describe what the factory had produced. The Sirocco name had no relevance to the young people living in the Protestant communities near the site, instead the site is known to them as a waste-ground 'hangout' of the young people from the Short Strand community.

The Sirocco name carries more significance with the older members of the Protestant communities, as the Sirocco Company mainly employed Protestant men. Indeed, one of those interviewed was 70 year old man who had been an apprentice at the Sirocco works. However, he had few fond memories of his time at the Sirocco site and had left to work in the shipyards having been attracted by better salaries, working conditions and prospects.

This man's life-story reflects a broad feeling within the Protestant community. Belfast's industrial heritage is considered as very important to community, as many of its members had worked in the factories and shipyards. The shipyards are of particular importance and talked about with a clear sense of personal and community pride. This pride is publicly celebrated in the many murals around East Belfast, where people were keen to point out the Harland & Wolff cranes have been replacing the more sinister images of masked-paramilitaries.

While the shipyards, linen mills, rope factories and aerospace industries are regarded with a sense of pride by the Protestant communities, the same cannot be said about the Sirocco Site. People remembered the Sirocco works in terms of the declining quality of Belfast manufacturing, with one man saying that Sirocco had produced quality products, but by the end the factory was churning out sub-quality products for the third world.



The Sirocco Brand is not considered with the same pride as with the other aspects of Belfast's industrial heritage. There is little nostalgia for the brand but on a practical level people knew the site as the 'Sirocco Site' and thought changing this might cause some confusion.

The Sirocco brand was associated with 'The Troubles' among the Protestant communities. Many people recalled the time when workers were transported in and out of the site in armoured vehicles, as they were being stoned by protesters from the Short Strand community. They recalled how the factory had been a Protestant only site, apart from the Catholic female cleaners in the evenings.

In general, the members of the Protestant communities that were consulted thought that the Sirocco brand was affiliated with Belfast's past. While they spoke of other industrial sites and brands with great pride, Sirocco was associated with poor quality and the city's more negative past. There was a consensus among those consulted that the Sirocco brand no longer carried any cache. However, while the brand carried little emotional cache, the site is known to everyone as the Sirocco site or Sirocco works. Many people thought that on a practical level, changing the name would lead to confusion.

## 8. Affordable Housing, House Prices and Homes

There were clear understandings about how the types of housing people lived in changes according to stage of life. People were clear that flats were the preference for young and single people. Bungalows were more suited to the elderly and families should live in a proper house. The understanding that a family should live in house is, at one level, based on practical considerations; in that a house is perceived to have more space and has separate floors that help reduce noise. However, at another level this is more than pragmatics, as flats can obviously be of different sizes and can have more than one floor. The understanding that families should live in houses is also a cultural issue. This is affected by idealised memories, aspirations and desired lifestyles, as well as understandings of properly providing for and supporting ones children and family. While in Europe there is a long history of family apartment living, in Northern Ireland – like elsewhere in the UK – this is not yet the case.



Types of housing were understood to appeal to different demographic categories: bungalows for the elderly, flats for the young and houses for families

One of the key concerns for members of both the Catholic and Protestant communities was that house prices have risen so quickly that many people are being priced out of the Belfast housing market. People from both the Catholic and Protestant communities complain that the Housing Executive is not meeting their social housing needs, but they cannot afford to purchase the properties being built by the private developers.



There is concern about the rising house prices in East Belfast and that people cannot afford to buy a home in their own community

This process has been seen elsewhere in the UK and its social impact has been well documented (see studies by the Young Foundation, for example. in the East End of London).

One of the social consequences has been that there has not been the housing available for families to continue to live near each other. This has resulted in the break-up of the sense of local community and the family support networks, both of which were important factors in affecting how safe members of both communities feel in an area.

In addition to contributing to community safety, homeownership is an emotional and social investment in an area. People who own their homes feel that they have a far greater stake in a neighbourhood and are less likely to be involved in or tolerate disturbances and anti-social behaviour.

The Sirocco development is not a social housing scheme and the local communities do not expect the Carvill Group to offer such services. However, the concerns about local people being priced out of their own community are real and, as has been seen elsewhere in the UK, can fuel long term feelings of discontent. There are a number of options available to developers interested in making their properties more affordable to a wider range of people. These have the added advantage of increasing the number of local people living in a development and building a sense of community, rather than having outside investors purchasing properties and making profits through short-term leases.

- **Shared Ownership.** Operated through housing associations, this scheme allows people to purchase a share (usually 50%) of the property and pay rent on the rest. There is the opportunity to purchase further shares of the property at a later date.
- **Joint Ownership.** This is a private agreement between up to four individuals who agree to purchase a property together. Essentially this is not a housing scheme, but an option available to people who cannot afford to buy the entire property. In some cases two families have bought together for their respective children. While this is obviously open to everyone, many people are unaware of this option. There is the opportunity to produce a 'fact-sheet' type information campaign or even a website where prospective joint owners could introduce themselves. As joint ownership has no third-party involved and would be more suited to the Sirocco development.

It should be noted that whilst there was some initial excitement amongst Short Strand residents that the Sirocco development might provide housing for Short Strand residents, there were no complaints from any of those consulted about the idea of 'pepper-potting' social housing throughout the site and providing equal numbers of units to housing executives from both Protestant and Catholic communities. Provided that the consultation process (between both communities and Carvill) is ongoing and the needs of each community are taken into account so as to provide the most suitable housing, the current plans are welcomed.

## 9. Outsiders inside the communities

One of the consequences of the rising house prices is that the majority of the working class Protestant communities are unable to afford to purchase the new properties that are being developed in the area. Rather than local residents moving into these developments, the properties are being bought by more affluent outsiders – the developments become known as ‘yuppie flats’. Although residents complain that these new-comers do little to participate in community life – largely keeping themselves to themselves – at present there is no sign of any resentment or tensions developing. The new developments are considered to be neutral spaces and – because of the largely young professional class of residents – play no part in the Protestant/Catholic conflicts.

That said, concerns were raised by the community leaders about the long term consequences of the lack of affordable housing for local communities.



More affluent outsiders are moving into the new developments in the area. In one new development of the 62 apartments only two were bought by local people. There are concerns about how this will affect the sense of local community that is highly valued by residents.

While the middle classes that are moving into the new developments in the area have not created feelings of resentment, the recent immigration of people from outside of Ireland and the UK into the working class areas have sparked racial and ethnic tensions. Long term local residents are concerned about the people arriving from East Europe, Africa and Asia and perceive them as a threat to their housing and jobs. Indeed one of the young people we worked with commented that sectarianism is being replaced by racism. Lessons from elsewhere in Europe show that it is very easy to dismiss the views of the white working class as prejudice and racist, but this race smoke-screen can conceal very real worries about changing employment trends, access to housing, changing community structures and access to other services.

To some extent, these issues are yet to face the Short Strand community because of a) the lack of housing within the Short Strand meaning that any housing which does become available immediately caters to Catholics and existing community families and b) the relatively small size and insularity of the community. Fears in the Short Strand relate more to the threats from within, (such as drugs and violence) though young people are aware, like their Protestant counterparts, that problems of sectarianism may well translate into problems of racism in the future.

## 10. The Future

The end of the troubles and the ongoing peace has been generally welcomed by all those we spoke to. The cessation of the violence has transformed the lives of those living in East Belfast and now they have a taste for peace, most people cannot envisage a return to the dark days of the past.

While peace and the political processes continue to be considered in a positive light, it is important to not to get carried away and look at the whole situation through rose-tinted glasses. As this research has shown, everyday lives are still shaped by the memories of the past and tensions between the Catholic and Protestant communities remain. Cross-community relations are improving, but remain in their infancy. And importantly, random events still have the potential to radically change the political and social landscape in the area.

That said, all the research findings were positive. People see a future in which Belfast is becoming a modern and thriving city. The development of the Sirocco Site is viewed as part of this transformation. Although there are concerns about specific issues, people welcomed the chance to take part in the consultation and were enthusiastic about the development.

# 11. Residents of the new apartments

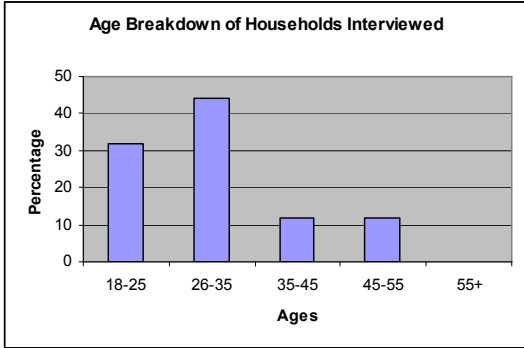
Questionnaire-based household surveys were carried out with 26 different households in the new riverside apartments on Laganbank Road (on the west bank of the river) and Laganview Court (on the east bank next to the Sirocco site). The proximity of these residents to the Sirocco site was reason enough for their inclusion in the consultation. However, during the research it became clear that these residents were of the socio-economic groups that would be more likely to be able to afford much of the housing proposed for the Sirocco site and so their views and opinions also deliver insight into the potential demographic of the Sirocco development.



The new residential developments surveyed in the study

## Demographics

The large majority of the residents of the new apartments were young professionals. The chart below clearly illustrates how 76% percent of surveyed were aged between 18 and 35 years old. While, as one would expect, the residents were employed in wide range of occupations, it was clear that nearly all of them could be classed as professionals. There were a significant number of accountants working at the nearby PWC office, lawyers working in the Laganside Courts and also teachers, civil servants, IT professionals and managers in various industries.



There were no families in the sample that we interviewed and several respondents said that they were unaware of any families with children living in their block. The vast majority of the households were made of single people or couples, with several flats housing three adults. These three-person households were all young people privately renting the accommodation. The single-person and couple households were a mixture of self-owned and private rents.

A number of the young couples that were interviewed said that they did not feel that they would stay in their current homes when they started a family. They said that families are better suited to houses rather than flats and they would want to move out to areas with more space, gardens

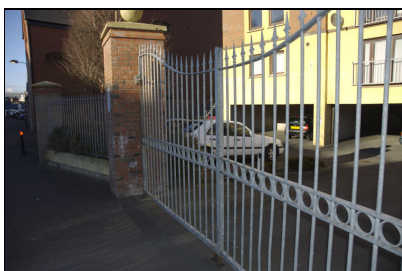


and better schools when they had children. This understanding of families being suited to houses rather than flats echoes the findings from both the Catholic and Protestant communities, despite being from very different socio-economic groups.

## Community & Safety

Nearly all of those questioned stated that they did not feel a part of a particular community. Only one man mentioned any sense of affinity to the local communities in East Belfast, as he had grown up in the Short Strand. As a local, he was also in a minority. Not one of the other residents spoken to were from the local Catholic or Protestant communities, with most being from elsewhere in Belfast or Northern Ireland. There were a significant number from other countries including England, India, France, Israel and the Irish Republic.

It is interesting that in both the Catholic and Protestant areas of East Belfast the predominant reason people stated that for feeling safe was that they were part of a community, living among their family and friends. With the majority of people not feeling part of a community, this was not the case for the residents of the apartments. Rather, they said they felt safe in their homes because of the high security gates, secure parking, buzzer entrance systems, good lighting and hi-tech locks. This could not have been more different to the other local communities where the research team were (pleasantly) amazed to find people leaving their doors unlocked when they go out.



Residents stated they felt safe in the new developments because of the security systems in place. This contrasted with the other local communities who felt safe because they knew the people in the neighbourhood. Creating this sense of local community can provide an alternative to 'gated developments' and further segregation.

While most residents stated that they did not feel part of a community, this is not to say all of them did not or that people did not want to feel part of a community. Several people stated that they felt part of the resident community of the blocks, particularly those that owned their flats. They had held a meetings and parties and wished there were more events that did more to establish this sense of community.

The emphasis is quite clearly on the residents when creating a sense of community, however, several of the people interviewed stated that they thought the designers of their buildings could have done more to facilitate this. Environmental and green issues were mentioned a number of times as being a good way of building this sense of community. Residents commented that recycling facilities had not been designed into the building structure and were latterly put in the car park, which looked bad and caused a mess. Green transport infrastructure, such as

providing secure cycle storage was also an issue, as many people used bikes to get around the city (this was not evident in the other two communities studied).

Members of several households were keen to develop the idea of a riverside community. This was connected to the green transport, as the riverside cycle paths were popular. However, people thought that not enough was being made of the riverside by planners and developers. The benefit of the river is, until now, limited to being just a view. There is a much greater potential for people to interact in and engage with the riverside space.

## **The City Centre**

The working, social and retail lives of those living in the new apartments focus on Belfast City Centre. Of the 26 people interviewed, 20 worked in the city centre, 24 did the majority of their socialising there and 21 did the most of their shopping there. The proximity to the centre was the most quoted reason for moving into the developments and a number of people, on both sides of the river, stated that they felt as if where they lived was a part of the city centre.

The residents of Laganview Court, the site closest to the Sirocco site, cross into the city centre using the Queens Bridge. Although the footbridge that is part of the railway bridge is a more direct route, people consider this to be unsafe. The bridge is uninviting and has the appearance of being caged in and groups of young people gather around this bridge in the evenings to drink and 'hang out'.

Although people state that they feel part of the city centre, but, in terms of movement this is not strictly the case. One of the features of the city centre is the two-way movement: people come and go. There is not this two way movement from the new developments: residents go to the city centre, but there is nothing that draws others to the developments. The poor access, as discussed above, is part of this, but the primary reason that there is not this movement is because, at present, there is nothing that brings people the other way: there is no pull. The retail and commercial opportunities in the Sirocco site could change this.

## **Wants, needs and concerns**

Although two of those interviewed were interested in buying a flat in the Sirocco site, the majority of people were more concerned with retail and leisure facilities. The vast majority of requests were for small supermarkets or good grocery shops. Residents on both sides of the river stated that they were poorly served by local convenience shopping, newsagents and off-licences. People living on the west bank of the Lagan said that they would definitely cross to make use of any shopping facilities, as long as the access to the site was improved.

A gym was another feature that people wanted in the neighbourhood. Since the closure of the Mayfield Leisure Centre, there are few facilities for people in the area. Many of the residents wanted a smart (indicating private) gym on the site.

The under-use of the water front was mentioned by many of those we spoke to. People living on both sides of the river said that they would like to see coffee shops or bars along the river banks. They complained that the tall wall closes off the space alongside the walkway in front of the Sirocco site and contributes to the threatening atmosphere. A more open space with busy coffee shops would transform this oppressive space into an area where people would cross the

river to enjoy. The main water front is not optimised on the west bank of the river because, with the exception of The Edge restaurant, the coffee shops and bars do not overlook the river.

The residents of Langanview Court were concerned about how some of the plans for the Sirocco site would affect their properties. Many of these concerns were unfounded and stemmed from a lack of consultation. This finding was reported in the ESRO interim report and the Carvill Group subsequently organised a consultation meeting with the residents who were interested.

Below is a table summary of the key concerns of the current residents in the new flats on the Laganside and some suggested opportunities for Carvill to pre-empt these concerns within the Sirocco site.

<b>Key concern</b>	<b>Opportunities for Carvill</b>
There is a desire for community amongst the residents despite often not having a clear sense of community to identify with...	<p>The promotion of a site website which is started by the developers and agents and then handed over to the residents, might be a good way to begin this. Each flat could be provided with an email address (e.g. <a href="mailto:no15@sirocco.com">no15@sirocco.com</a>) through which to receive and send news about their new neighbourhood.</p> <p>A concern with environmental issues seemed to unite residents and some community had formed in an effort to provide adequate recycling for example. Carvill could take a lead on this.</p>
There is no reason to cross the river...	The Carvill development is likely to counter this problem with the development of the entertainment and leisure facilities on the Eastern side of the Lagan – thus extending the City Centre over the water.
There is an under use of the riverside and the current walkways feel closed off and intimidating	Carvill can take a lead here in opening up the riverside to waterfront cafes, open spaces and places for people to congregate safely and openly. And by bringing down the wall of the Sirocco site.
The current footbridge to the city centre is dangerous and intimidating	The building of a new bridge between the Sirocco site and the city centre would be welcomed by everyone.

