



**25<sup>th</sup> August 2010**

**Forthspring Inter Community Group Response  
Belfast City Council's consultation on Phase 11 of the  
Belfast Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan 2011-2013**

**Introduction**

Whilst the majority of Northern Ireland society has progressed and are enjoying the benefits the peace process has brought, interface areas, which have reportedly suffered the greatest during the period commonly referred to as "The Troubles", are still in despondency. Recognised in Northern Ireland as areas of religious and political opposites and therefore at risk of sporadic incidents of unrest, interfaces are characterized by walls, fences, dereliction, wire, open spaces, desolation, poor environment and a general lack of economic activity. Forthspring is situated on the Falls/Shankill interface and has over 12 years experience of providing services on a cross community basis.

Forthspring Inter Community Group is committed to providing services to local people in the Springfield/Woodvale area and promoting good relations within and between these communities. Forthspring's vision is of a diverse and peaceful community, where all people are free to live with dignity, hope, respect and understanding. Forthspring has been providing a much needed safe and welcoming environment where people from both communities can meet and find a different way from the violence and division of the past. Forthspring brings together Protestants and Catholics to increase tolerance, understanding and trust by supporting people to talk about their religious, cultural and political similarities and differences within a safe space.

Using a community development model, a range of programmes are delivered that bring together people of all ages to move across the wall and to break down barriers. These include youth provision; work with men and women, mothers and toddlers, after schools and senior citizens. Current projects include a local history project, good relations and planning for your future that engages local

people in exploring the potential for social and economic development and the changing planning environment.

Forthspring welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Belfast City Council's consultation on Phase 11 of the Belfast Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan 2011-2013. Fortspring acknowledges the value and importance peace funding from Europe has had in helping Northern Irish society move towards a sustainable peace. As this is the last tranche of Peace funding, it is vital that it contributes and is utilised to achieve a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland.

Forthspring would advocate for community-led strategies for dealing with contested space and to help overcome the physical and mental barriers endured by these local communities. Lasting peace can best be achieved if it is driven by local communities/local people and community organisations. It is therefore important that the need for community led strategies is reflected in Phase 11 of BCC's Peace 111 programme.

### **Phase 11 of the Belfast Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan 2011-2013**

In terms of the proposals for phase two of the BCC Peace 111 programme, Fortspring endorses the four themes:

- Building Shared City Space
- Transforming Contested Spaces
- Building Shared Cultural Space
- Building Shared Organisational Space

Forthspring believes that resources must be targeted at those areas most profoundly affected by the conflict where the legacy of the conflict remains strong. Interface areas are still affected by post conflict violence as demonstrated so violently in July of this summer. This potential for violence has shattered many communities across the city.

Forthspring benefited from phase one of the Peace Programme delivered through Belfast City Council. To support our emphasis on the importance of deploying local strategic approaches, the following is an extract from an evaluation undertaken by the Institute of Conflict Research in relation to one of the peace funded programmes,

The Mixed Gender Dialogue/Planning Group;

*"The planning group was clearly a well-structured and facilitated fora for discussing the issues which impacted upon the lives of local residents in the area, such as the impact of the interface wall as a barrier to the access of local services and facilities. Involvement in the group was the*

*first time that a number of participants had engaged with others from 'across the interface' to talk about the local area and these issues in a suitably safe and neutral space."*  
(John Bell , ICR May 2010)

## **Recommendations**

In terms of the consultation on Phase 11 of the Belfast Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan 2011-2013 Forthspring would recommend or comment that:

- A general comment in relation to all indicative budgets is that there is an absence of support for local community led activity. Forthspring believes that it is activity on the ground and the involvement of local people, in particular those living at interfaces, which will build better relations between communities and cultures. Whilst we acknowledge the need for city wide and commissioned projects there is insufficient allocation of funds to local approaches. These local approaches would support citywide and commissioned projects.
- Forthspring raises concerns that over a third of the indicative allocation for Transforming Contested Space will be used to develop a recycling centre on the former Mackie's site by December 2013 with a shared space ethos. Forthspring, based on twelve years experience working in this area would question the use of peace funding to develop a recycling centre. We would also question how a recycling centre will allow the communities of mid Springfield and Woodvale to develop better communication and relationships working towards a sustainable peaceful future for the two communities of that area, bearing in mind there remains an extensive peace wall which still blights the landscape and separates the two communities. Forthspring would ask that this budget be discussed further between Council and local representation before approval.
- A limit should be imposed on the amount of a small grant as opposed to the number of small grants. There have been quite a number of successful local projects delivered on a small budget. Keeping the restriction to a maximum number of projects will impede small but successful approaches. A review of the first phase clearly indicates the success of the small grants approach.
- Commissioned and partner led approaches need to be more accountable to local projects and it should be a requirement that commissioned and partner led projects should, at a bare minimum be required and engage with all relevant projects within the area they intend delivering.

## **Conclusion**

Forthspring supports the need for additional funding in interface areas within Belfast. These interface areas have suffered disproportionately over the period of the conflict and are among the most socially excluded communities in our society. In addition to high levels of deprivation, these areas have had a high exposure to political violence. Long term investment could help these communities overcome social and economic disadvantage. As yet the peace dividend has not reached interface areas and the lack of a policy has resulted in a policy vacuum and lack of decision making. In the meantime interface areas continue to be segregated plunging further into economic and social decline.

Northern Ireland is rapidly progressing into a globalised society where we see greater cultural diversity in many aspects of life. Northern Ireland is quickly moving away from the situation where there were only two main communities and is slowly making the transition to a more multicultural society. This presents a challenge for society as a whole to ensure that they are able to cater for the needs of all citizens. Set against the back drop of a Northern Ireland that is becoming more pluralist as it emerges from a prolonged period of division and dissension Forthspring would champion the continued efforts to increase cross community contact and relationship building within interface areas. In conclusion adequate allocation of the peace budget should be used to rebuild interface areas and relationships.