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Connecting the Row

The Sandy Row Physical and Built
Environment Growth Strategy



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1.0 Introduction

Sandy Row Community Forum [SRCF] has been assisted by funding from the Housing Executive [HE] to commission a Physical and Built Environment Growth Strategy for the area. The primary purpose of the strategy is to contribute to the progress of work to date in Sandy Row and the wider environs in enhancing revitalization and regeneration of the area and to strengthen sustainability for the future. The strategy seeks to understand the influencing factors from the internal and external environment that provides the context for growth and to offer solutions to ensure these factors are connected and understood by all stakeholders. It seeks to consider the evolving capacity and capability of key stakeholders to contribute to connectedness and sustainability.

The anticipated objectives of the work are:

- Connections will be identified and analysed to assist sustainability.
- Key developments in, and adjoining, the Sandy Row area will be considered with opportunities for synergy, built with wider area's physical and built environment
- Considerations will contribute to the protection, rejuvenation and regeneration of the existing housing estate in Sandy Row.
- Cross-sectoral partners will be assisted in their engagement, planning and implementation activities in the area.
- Future decision making, operational planning and implementation will be enhanced by reflective best practice.

The objectives for this report need to be considered in regard to their contribution to the SRCF #SandyRowWeWant¹ community ambitions which state that by 2030 Sandy Row will be:

- > A Connected & Engaged Community
- > A Culturally Confident & Safer Community
- > A Financially Thriving Community
- > A Healthy & Resilient Community
- > A Greener & Sustainable Community
- > An Age Friendly Community
- > A Learning Community

These are outcomes shared with key social partners who are equally ambitious for Sandy Row and the wider environs. The outcomes are used as a central framework for the growth strategy findings.

The primary purpose of the strategy is to contribute to the progress of work to date in Sandy Row...

1. SANDY+ROW+2030.pdf

1.1 Methodology

A plethora of documents exist concerned with past, current and future initiatives in the Sandy Row area. This report sought to undertake a practical learning journey along Sandy Row and its immediate environs and to link schemes, projects, services and resources that are undoubtedly working towards achieving shared outcomes that impact positively on people and the area as a whole.

The following activities and tools were used:

- Tell the story of the who, what, why, where and when to date of the Sandy Row area, to outline what has been found combining information and analysis as a "connected whole"; to draw conclusions and make recommendations.
- Use a map to see and talk about connections. The map is used as the cover for the report and replicated in the accompanying document Walking the Row. In many of the reports and plans reviewed there are numerous maps and images of Sandy Row and its environs. To make the connections among and between key stakeholders for this report, a simple hand drawn map was used as a focus for conversations with diverse stakeholders on planned schemes, projects, services and resources. It identified the significant opportunities and some challenges that exist for the area.
- Engage and clarify with key stakeholders to ensure shared understanding of planned schemes, projects, services and resources and to think about the emerging issues in both the detail and the "big picture".
- Use best practice for analysis and to assist in formulating recommendations.

Researching "best practice" included reviewing information from previous resources. The SRCF Revitalise Report² published in 2008 had referred to the potential of the "Main Street USA"³ as a model of best practice adapted for Sandy Row to contribute to catalysing reinvestment, creating jobs, and fostering pride of place. Since then, the Main Street USA has been revisited and updated to provide a structure used to facilitate a "smart growth economic development strategy"⁴. The strategy, used throughout this report, focuses on balancing the crucial elements of supporting enterprises, workers and improving quality of life, building sustainability while achieving short term gains. Key principles are stated and key steps recommended which are transferable for best practice purposes to underpin the growth strategy for Sandy Row. Consideration of ways to increase engagement and participation are also considered using the model of Civic Stewardship⁵ which is also referenced later in the report.

The Smart Growth Economic Development Strategy principles and key steps have been used as a framework to present the findings and analysis of the consultation and research undertaken for the report. It is recommended that the entire document with case studies and the Civic Stewardship documents are read by other stakeholders for their own consideration.

The section that follows simply sets out the "story" and findings shared through the report process in order to ensure consistent knowledge and understanding of the richness and potential opportunities for revitalisation that exist in Sandy Row and the wider environs.

2. Sandy Row Community Forum Revitalise Report

3. www.mainstreet.org

4. Using Smart Growth Strategies To Foster Economic Development: A Kelso, Washington, Case Study Pdf

5. www.civicstewardship.com/

2.0 Walking and Talking the Row

Over the last 11 years a series of initiatives have taken place to address the context of deprivation in the Sandy Row area. Policy response and strategic assistance from key Government Departments and agencies such as the Department of Communities, the Executive Office, the Housing Executive and Belfast City Council have aligned with the key community organisations and other social partners to mitigate the risks and strengthen the opportunities to revitalise the area.

The map used as a focus for the consultations provided invaluable in affirming for the consultees the developments they knew and more importantly didn't know about.

The accompanying document to this report '**Walking the Row**' sets out information on the various sites and activities either existing or to be considered in the future, particularly the large capital build projects.

This section of the report sets out the findings and analysis from the work undertaken for this report. Descriptors of the key outcomes from the SRCF 2030 strategy are used to connect the diverse aspects of the growth strategy outlined in this report.



2.1 Connected

It is essential to emphasise that in carrying out the consultations, a significant amount of good will and ambition was expressed by all the consultees for a "connected" approach that would enable key stakeholders to see the "bigger picture" as well as the detail of their own particular initiatives.

There was universal agreement among all consultees that the major capital build projects (Weavers Cross Transport Hub; Gilpins Site Regeneration and Hope Street Site Revitalisation⁶) provide "once in a lifetime" opportunities for significant growth in the area, connected as they are in timing and location with substantial investment. The Social Investment Fund has assisted Belfast South Community Resource [BSCR] to purchase and refurbish premises in Sandy Row to enhance the facilities and support the provision of additional community services, including training provision.

Capital build developments supported by private investment include the new Hilton Hotel adjacent to Linfield Road and Hope Street with additional social and private enterprise potential investments. These were considered by various consultees during the discussions. Murray's Exchange and the Weaver's Court campus style City Centre Business Park are existing capital investment projects that are models of best practice in building their connections with the resident community while promoting their own connectivity to central Belfast and accessibility for business on a global scale.

The Weavers Court site promotes this connectivity and accessibility in different ways:

- > 8 minutes walk to City Hall
- > 5 minutes walk to Main Rail and Bus Hub
- > 5 minutes drive to Motorways
- > 15 minutes drive to City Airport
- > 30 minutes drive to International Airport

This is simple, accurate information that could be added to and promoted by others, particularly in terms of the connectivity of the broader area of Sandy Row to encourage investment and footfall. This connectivity may be further enhanced if and when the Bankmore and Shaftsbury Links are opened to provide a joined up traffic network across the Belfast City area.

A challenge identified by many consultees is the need to ensure that the capital build projects identified above do not create a "two-tier" neighbourhood i.e. a shiny vibrant area enclosed within a "golden triangle" of opportunity [Weavers Cross, Gilpins, Hope St, Murrays and Weavers Court] while the remaining south-facing locale from Gilpins to the Lisburn Road remains vulnerable to dereliction, absentee landlords and/or private developers with little connection built to the overall growth of this historic and rapidly evolving area and the people who live and work there.

It is essential that a parallel process of growth development for this part of the "Row" is put in place with the same joined up partners involved with the "golden triangle" opportunities.

Translink have agreed to carry out environmental improvements to the pavements and street scape from their transport hub to the Gilpins site and have appointed a dedicated community engagement representative to support the ongoing consultations. The Urban Villages Initiative has already begun discussion on similar streetscaping from the Gilpins site to Donegal Road as well as decorative items such as hanging baskets and Christmas lighting.

It is essential that Government and city council representatives concerned with roads, lighting, pavements, parking, traffic flow and other aspects of infrastructural improvement are brought to the planning table to connect all aspects of environmental responsibility and accountability.

⁶ See Appendix for detailed information of all three developments

2.1 Connected

Previous reports on the area and the discussions for this document suggest the need to address the dereliction and improve the footfall from the Gilpins site to the Donegall Road junction is vital. Previous reports "Sandy Row 2015" and "Revitalise" produced by SRCF referred to the possibility of creating a "Main Street" brand for this part of the Row. The Main Street movement is still strong in the USA with ongoing learning contributing to developing "walkable, human-scale neighbourhoods, flexible and affordable space for entrepreneurs, and safe and inviting housing opportunities for the growing population that is interested in living downtown⁷".

Other ideas discussed during the consultations included: Living Over the Shops Scheme [as in the 96 Sandy Row social enterprise accommodation] creative and digital industry studios, small offices, and pop up shops. The reality is that at the moment there is no "masterplan" for this section of Sandy Row and the implications for the area overall are challenging.

This was reflected in a number of the comments by consultees reported below;

"Painting empty shops means they're still empty"

"What will it take to encourage people to walk down the whole of Sandy Row when they exit the Transport Hub?"

"We need to make sure that the whole of Sandy Row is connected, not just the one end"

"This requires a Masterplan that is financially coherent. We need to get a group of people who can drive this forward."

2.2 Engaged

A vital aspect of a connected and engaged community is that citizens actively participate in community and civic life and social capital (bonding, bridging and linking citizens). Engagement is crucial to achieve the specific goals within the overall strategy. It is essential that communities have the opportunity to set their own aligned goals.

For the approach to succeed practically, there is a need to build the capacity, capability and competence of representatives from diverse communities of interest to operate as internal and external advocates and to ensure implementation of specific and practical ways to strengthen the assets and reduce the barriers for success in the area. The previous success of this approach in the SRCF Shoulder to Shoulder project has demonstrated the potential contribution that peer advocates can bring to consultation, planning and operational activities.

There are various opportunities within the planned initiatives that would assist in building social capital and active participation in Sandy Row. They do require resourcing but are also compatible with the strategic policy aims of the various social partners.

The Urban Villages Initiative consultation response suggested that a way to provide a cohesive approach to engagement is that *"all social partners should be committed to the principles of Civic Stewardship and sustainability around specific interventions to ensure that delivery is built on shared priorities."*

The mission of the civic stewardship initiative⁸ is to enable communities to learn and work together, and with institutional partners, for improved equity and wellbeing citywide. It enables communities to join with institutions as equal partners to co-create and implement systemic solutions at neighbourhood and citywide levels. It provides a platform of "stewardship capabilities" to promote civic innovation and collaboration. These capabilities include: leadership development, rigorous measures, communication technologies, participatory innovation, knowledge management, and results-based funding.

If the Urban Villages Initiative was to resource and pilot Civic Stewardship in Sandy Row, including the development of neighbourhood stewards⁹, who are funded, trained residents passionate about improving community wellbeing then ongoing capacity building, revitalisation, and Good Relations work can be integrated to build sustainability. All social partners including representatives from Translink, statutory bodies, businesses and community would then be engaged and connected implementing innovative forms of "community-institution" collaboration.

The potential for a needs-based problem solving approach could be linked to the civic stewardship scheme. Key community representatives in the area could lead the facilitation of a discussion and planning exercise to identify ways to optimise participation of those who live and work in the Sandy Row area with the current and emerging development opportunities linked to supporting the community, developing the workforce and improving the quality of life.

Opportunities such as the Gilpins Site, Weavers Cross and Hope Street Site development can only increase prospects to build connections and engagement to enhance sustainability across the area. The connections and engagement made can encompass sustainability initiatives beyond physical and environmental growth such as cultural capital building and contributing to a safer Sandy Row. These aspects are considered in the sub section that follows.

Engagement is crucial to achieve the specific goals within the overall strategy.



7. www.mainstreet.org/main-street/main-street-news/2017-announcements/the-road-to-improved-economic.html

8. www.civicstewardship.com/

9. www.civicstewardship.com/uploads/Civic_Stewardship_Initiative_-_presentation_w-o_appendix_on_CSI_capabilities_-_DRAFT.pdf

2.3

Walking the Row



- 1 Murrays Tobacco Factory
- 2 Gilpins
- 3 Holiday Inn
- 4 Hampton by Hilton
- 5 92-94 Sandy Row (Ena's Chip Shop)
- 6 Wee Ruby's Block
- 7 96 Sandy Row
- 8 Benedicts Hotel (Lower Donegall Road Development)
- 9 Weavers Court
- 10 Blythefield Primary School
- 11 Arellian Nursery
- 12 Blythefield Park
- 13 Charter Youth Club / 4G Pitch
- 14 Utility Street Mens Hostel
- 15 Presbyterian Housing
- 16 Fletcher Lodge
- 17 BSCR/ Digital Hub
- 18 Sandy Row Community Centre
- 19 Potential Belfast Central Mission Dementia/Elderly Accommodation
- 20 Sandy Row Orange Hall
- 21 Youth Hostel / Ulidia Apartments
- 22 Main Sandy Row Estate
- 23 Whitehall Square
- 24 Tollgate House
- 25 Victoria Place
- 26 Choice Housing Gt Victoria Street
- 27 Sandy Row Boxing Gym/ Commercial Development
- 28 Bankmore Square Development
- 29 Fairy Garden
- 30 Community Garden
- 31 Main St / Sandy Row Economic Core
- 32 Transport Hub
- 33 Hope Street Site
- 34 City Way Flats
- 35 P&E Stores Site

Key

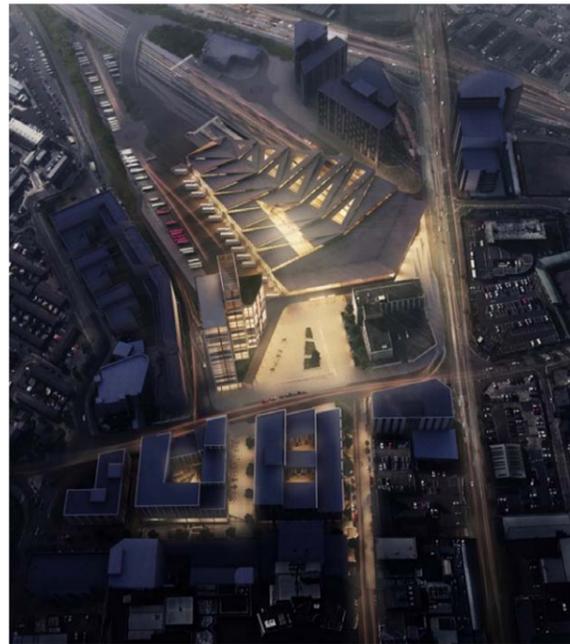
- Community Interest
- Commercial
- Community Enterprise
- Statutory Ownership
- Public Space
- Residential

2.4 Culturally Confident, Safer & Age Friendly Community;

The measures of a culturally confident and safer community set out in the Sandy Row Outcomes document are that: “residents state that they are proud of their area: people feel safe to live and work in the area: There is growth in tourism and visitors to the area and that diversity is embraced”.

A commitment to “express, celebrate and pass on the rich heritage” was and remains the primary motive and driver for the Sandy Row Revitalise Our Heritage¹⁰ initiative. Since its inception, significant development has taken place on cultural heritage in the area through the efforts of the Sandy Row Community Forum. The Revitalise Our Heritage plan and its’ outworkings’ to date including the development of the Sandy Row Walking Tours, the proposed Community Tour base and retail unit at 96 Sandy Row, the building of the Sandy Row brand and website¹¹ and ongoing initiatives to capture and share the history and heritage of the area. The next phase in the SRCF Revitalise Our Heritage Project is being developed in partnership with Belfast Archive Project. This is examining past archives of Sandy Row History while beginning to create an archive of ‘NOW’ for the future. The project is being led by the Thursday Morning Men’s Breakfast Club & Sandy Row Tours. A project such as this would provide an ideal opportunity for the community and Translink to mutually benefit from its work.

The Weavers Cross Transport Hub representatives taking part in the consultation acknowledge the richness of the heritage in the area. It is crucial that a partnership is developed with the community and the Sandy Row Revitalise Our Heritage representatives to integrate the history and images of the area into the modern design of the Hub to create a vital connection between the past, the present and the future. The employment of a dedicated community engagement officer by Translink can provide a focus for future engagement in utilising the significant heritage work already undertaken by SRCF and assist Weavers Cross Transport Hub to reflect the historical richness of the area as well as the dynamic and evolving opportunities presented to its users as they exit Weavers Cross to continue their journey through Belfast and beyond.



The historical significance of the Gilpins Site will be a vital aspect of the capital build project that needs to be sustained and enhanced, particularly in its contribution to the growth of visitors to the area and in providing a focus for an expression of local pride and identity. A recent report¹² on the site commented that although the buildings on the site are not currently listed they have architectural, historical and cultural value, from their beginnings as part of the Belfast and Ulster Brewing Company, their links to the early 20th Century political unrest in Northern Ireland and subsequently, as a location where the 36th Ulster Division trained before going into battle in WW1. Enough of the original brewery development remains to allow an appreciation of the history and development of the place.

The Revitalise Our Heritage plan identified several factors for consideration in assessing the potential to increase cultural capital in the Sandy Row area, in a way that could also contribute to economic, social and environmental capital, seeking to support any initiatives that contribute to welcoming people into the area to live, work and spend.

10. Sandy Row Revitalise Our Heritage Report 2012

11. www.historicsandyrow.co.uk/

12. Gilpins Site Concept Paper [draft] resourced through the Executive Office (TEO) Urban Villages Initiative

2.4 Culturally Confident, Safer & Age Friendly Community;

A balance needs to be achieved between sharing the history and heritage of the area with sharing a clear understanding that Sandy Row is not “stuck” in its history but is an evolving and vibrant place that acknowledges its past but is forward facing in its aspirations and ambitions. At a practical level this may mean dedicated, resourced and connected branding for the area as a whole. Potential contributions could include promotion of much that is developmental and welcoming about the “Row” including;

- Building a brand for Sandy Row as age friendly for an older and younger population. This includes linking the various initiatives for older people to access basic services such as Fletcher Lodge, the Fold and the potential BCM older people’s accommodation on Glengall Street.
- Promoting the innovative opportunities being developed in the local schools such as the work towards achieving status as a “school of sanctuary” A School of Sanctuary¹³ is a school that helps its students, staff and wider community understand what it means to be seeking sanctuary and to extend a welcome to everyone as equal, valued members of the school community. It is a school that is proud to be a place of safety and inclusion for all¹⁴ Other opportunities such as the “mindfulness” pilot in the Primary School and the Transitions work , the award winning Education Support After Schools and Homework clubs organised by BSCR and SRCF and ongoing Digital Education initiatives are outlined in the sub sections that follow.
- The impact and outcome of the inclusive and person-centred learning and training opportunities provided by BSCR and SRCF that have resulted in tangible achievements in expanding the diversity of the cultural and ethnic mix of those using their facilities.
- The contribution of community representatives and organisations to peacebuilding and conflict transformation locally, regionally and internationally.

- The support and outcomes of the development of a Community Safety Action Plan produced with the support of the BCC Safer City Co-ordinator and the South Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership. Collaboration and consultation took place with key stakeholders including community and elected representatives, the police, Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership agencies, the Housing Executive and other social partners.

Building a safer area can be connected to the recommendations outlined in the community safety action plan with initiatives such as the Safeguarding Partners work expanded to include other partners such as Translink, the HE and private developers in the area to work together to create a safer area for all.

Promotion and branding of the area needs to address the negative misconceptions of some or many about Sandy Row, the changes that hopefully will occur in tackling dereliction, the current and future enterprises and services available throughout the length of “Main Street” Sandy Row, and including the Digital and Learning Hub, Gilpins, Hope Street and Weavers Cross development.

At the same time it needs to be acknowledged for the Sandy Row population and its residents the process of private sector activity has been something of a roller coaster ride with a distinction between those traders who have maintained their presence in the area through challenging times, the absentee and /or high return on land developers who have not engaged with the community and the ethical developers and entrepreneurs who have worked consistently to optimise conditions that result in benefits for all.

Within the last three years the presence of the South Belfast Social Enterprise Hub has also contributed to the promotion of the area and its environs as a focus for other forms of entrepreneurial growth. This momentum needs to be sustained and grown within the area while continuing to address the wider issues that inhibit overall growth. These include affordable and sufficient housing, health, well-being, education, employment and economic sustainability. These are addressed in the sub section that follows.

13. & 14. schools.cityofsanctuary.org/

2.5 Financially Thriving, Healthy, Resilient, Learning & Greener Community

The Shoulder to Shoulder Report referenced previously used the diagram below to illustrate the range of conditions that impact upon the health, well-being and resilience of individuals, groups including families and communities.

Addressing the living and working conditions as well as the general socioeconomic context of the Sandy Row area is an integral part of the making the connection between consultation, results and outcomes for the community, with the community and by the community in partnership with others.

Particular attention in this sub section is given to housing, employment and enterprise as key influences upon the hearts and minds as well as the living and working conditions for local residents and their representatives.

Discussions and consultations have already begun with Elma Newberry, the HE Assistant Director Regeneration, who carried out a “walkabout” with SRCF representatives in April 2017. She is committed to ensuring that the residential population is sustained through the provision of affordable homes and, ensuring housing needs are met into the future.

A number of key issues were identified in terms of housing that need to be integrated into the overall plans for the area and to enable residents in the main housing estate to increase their pride in the area. These issues include;

- Prioritising and aligning environmental improvement schemes to happen en-masse rather than in a drip feed approach.
- Ensuring that new green technologies are present in households and new developments to ensure that running costs are reduced and environmental impact is low.
- Monitoring how public investment is impacting on the physical and built environment for the residents and ensuring that green spaces are maintained and enhanced. This will also be affected positively by Urban Village Initiative plans for the Blythefield School garden improvements and wall art; the physical improvements potential at Arellian Nursery, the play-park and football pitch regenerations, wall art at the Charter Youth Club, the lighting in the Fairy Garden, Christmas lights and Hanging baskets.
- Monitoring and responding to any opportunities to re-develop the City Way flats as houses in the future.
- Support for the residents group to expand. This can also be linked into the civic stewardship initiative referenced previously.

During the consultations for this report, discussions took place on the profile of “the residents” in Sandy Row. There is an existing and strong resident’s group that contributes to many aspects of community sustainability building and represents the interests of those who live in the main estate. However, increasingly there are other locations adjacent to the area where people reside in privately owned, rented accommodation or communal living social housing sites such as Tollgate House and the Men’s Hostel. This residential population is likely to expand if the Living Over the Shops scheme happens and if potential private and /or social enterprise driven service apartments are developed close to the Hope Street site as well as on the main streetscape and the Gilpins site.

2.5 Financially Thriving, Healthy, Resilient, Learning & Greener Community

It was suggested by one of the community consultees that a mixed use “housing residents” group is formed and supported by the Housing Executive Cohesion Unit to bring together a Housing Forum that is representative of all those who live in and adjoin the Sandy Row area to ensure their inclusion and engagement with the developments cited throughout this document. Such an initiative would be enhanced if integrated with the Civic Stewardship Initiative to enable the existing Sandy Row Residents Group to be adequately resourced to support a wider Housing Forum.

Reference was made previously to the need to promote all that is best in Sandy Row. This includes the significant work undertaken to date by SRCF and BSCR, the leading community organisations within the area on addressing the conditions that impact upon the health, well-being and resilience of individuals, groups including families and communities. This work is delivered by key staff and volunteers capable and confident to contribute to the various developments in the area.

Both SRCF and BSCR have been innovative in their social enterprise development to position themselves to build economic as well as social sustainability for the future. During the consultation process, it became clear that not all social partners are aware of this expertise within the community organisations. Indeed some of the other consultees are not themselves fully cognizant of the economic opportunities that can be generated through social enterprise. There is undoubtedly a new business model emerging and possible where an authentic partnership between private and social enterprises as well as public agencies can be harnessed to inform employment and employability opportunities.

Discussions have taken place among and between various individuals, agencies and organisations on potential initiatives such as: a social enterprise café on the Weavers Cross site; future potential community asset transfer opportunities; a “training academy” to enable individuals to be employment ready to work within the hospitality and catering sector; a recruitment and training enterprise linked to construction and security training, apprenticeships and employment; collaboration to harness the digital skills employment opportunities through connectivity with Weavers Court tenants and the BSCR Digital Hub and the growth of Boyne Enterprises as a social enterprise property development and management company. Opportunities in terms of social clauses and a future Social Value Act need also to be exploited.

It is vital that this aspect of economic development is connected through the same mechanism of shared consultation and planning to disseminate information for physical and environmental growth.

In a similar but different arena, Sandy Row is recognised as a community that supports and promotes the physical and mental well-being of its residents with many innovative projects and initiatives. Through the efforts of the two key community organisations in the area SRCF and BSCR with other social partners such as the Public Health Agency and the Belfast Trust these have included:

- The development of a Community Emotional Well Being Action Plan for the Sandy Row area.
- ‘Calm in the Chaos’ Project funded under PHA for the last 3 years working with individual residents, volunteers & staff around supporting their mental & emotional wellbeing with the Mindfulness Programme into primary school taken forward by BSCR.
- Shoulder to Shoulder research and recommendations for the health and well-being of ex-combatants and their families.
- The WTF development programme for young people incorporating sense of self with future planning.

2.5 Financially Thriving, Healthy, Resilient, Learning & Greener Community

- The support for the development of a social enterprise True Grit Gym by the Sandy Row Boxing Club and the promotion of the opportunities it brings to enhance health and well being.

Similar efforts have been made with the proactive drive expressed by BSCR as one of its primary goals to “*Tackle educational underachievement, barriers to employment and skills.*”¹⁵

Working in collaboration with other social partners across the area under the NRA theme of social renewal, BSCR seek to ensure that children, young people and adults benefit from development and learning support initiatives to access opportunities and support pathways to employment skills, educational and vocational education and training. It prides itself on its relationships with schools across the South Belfast area, working in collaboration to support educational achievement for all.

The Sandy Row IT Centre, run by BSCR through its Neighbourhood Renewal Contract, delivers high- quality IT training which is wide ranging in its skill level and accreditation opportunities, including the only Pearson VUE Centre in Belfast. This attracts learners diverse in their age, abilities and focus for learning and training. More recently BSCR has focused on the development of Digital Skills with children and young people.

The recent Gilpins Site Concept Paper reported that BSCR is one of eight organisations to benefit from initial investment by the Department of Communities (DfC) in creative digital equipment for community cultural hubs in Belfast, in partnership with the Nerve Centre. The investment was geared to having the facilities and expertise available to help increase public access to the latest digital equipment and give communities the opportunity to explore digital media and develop skills – be that in terms of basic IT and more hi-tech digital technologies such as filmmaking. It is understood that there are plans to build on this further to enable BSCR to operate as a digital community hub within their refurbished premises at 127-145 Sandy Row.

In addition connections have been made with Weavers Court clients at the forefront of digital technology to collaborate for mutual benefit.

Looking to the future potential opportunities exist to assist post primary schools to avail of the evolving digital services available within the Digital Hub. At a strategic level, the Sandy Row Community Forum (SRCF) have carried out a comprehensive consultation exercise to help inform meaningful dialogue and discussion within the South Belfast area around the future of education provision at Primary level “Generating discussion on collaboration in education” March 2013¹⁶

In the sub-section that follows the finding reported to date are considered in terms of a summary of conclusions with recommendations in the final section.

BSCR seek to ensure that children, young people and adults benefit from development and learning support initiatives to access opportunities and support pathways to employment skills, educational and vocational education and training.

15. BSCR Past and Future Report 2011

16. Revitalise Education Report 2013 SR+EDUCATION+REPORT.pdf

2.6 So What Do We All Know Now? - Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Communication and co-ordination will optimise connection.

The reports and appraisals reviewed for this report indicate that there is ample information that reflects Sandy Row and it's wider environs existing assets and barriers. The desk research found a plethora of qualitative and quantitative information from previous plans, surveys, economic appraisals etc.

Good communication and coordination among groups and agencies can help ensure that all available resources support the community's vision. For Sandy Row the community vision is that “Sandy Row will become the place in the city and region to live, work, visit and invest”¹⁷.

While good communication and co-ordination can appear to be the simplest of tasks, the consultations undertaken for this report indicate that some practical mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that the communication is consistent across all stakeholders and that the harmonisation of initiatives led by different groupings are better connected and utilised within the growth strategy for the area as a whole.

Therefore this report recommends the setting up of a Task and Finish Group which will have a holding brief to ensure that the “bigger picture” information is shared and disseminated. It is recommended that government departments and agencies at regional and local level as appropriate nominate those senior reporting officers, with decision making responsibilities to sit on this group alongside a number of community and other social partners. The Chair will be nominated by the community representatives and agreed with the statutory and other partners based on proven ability to meet the requirements set out in a specific job description. It is recommended that the Task and Finish Group has no more than 10 members who can bring to the table to the information and resources necessary to provide assistance on issues such as land use, consultations etc. ‘The Task and Finish’ Group will not replace the existing mechanisms for the capital build and other projects due to take place within the next 5-10 years but will provide a coherent and integrated resource to ensure connectivity, communication and co-ordination.

Conclusion 2: Sandy Row is a definable focus area where there is already momentum for potential transformational change.

The focus principle in the Main Street USA case studies suggest that investments of time, money, and other community resources are most effective when targeted to an area that is both big enough to offer opportunities for change and small enough to make tangible, visible improvements that will provoke investment. One of the things that distinguishes smart growth economic development strategies from more conventional approaches is the emphasis on specific place-based assets in a community being aligned to the capitalising opportunities available as the momentum towards growth is accelerated.

There is no doubt that over the last decade that longer term strategies for the Sandy Row area have been articulated. However, within the last three years and within the next five year planning cycle there undoubtedly exists “windows of opportunity” in capital build investment, ambition for the area and hope for community growth that can build social, environmental, cultural as well as economic sustainability.

As an effective smart growth economic development strategy for Sandy Row clear goals have been identified and connected to the specific conditions in the area based on the support of enterprises, people and improved quality of life e.g. maintain character and distinctive community assets: ensure compatibility of adjacent land uses and increase access to education, workforce development and job training opportunities. Setting feasible, accessible and desirable goals that are joined up, co-designed and have the right partners ensures that higher likelihood of shared ownership and responsibility linked to successful performance.

While it may appear obvious that the right tools are needed to achieve the agreed goals, the smart growth strategy approach suggests that the tools from social policy and social action need to be aligned with the focus on enterprises, workforce and quality of line. Best practice suggests cross-cutting themes which would also be of use for the Sandy Row area, i.e.

17. SANDY+ROW+2030.pdf

2.6 So What Do We All Know Now? - Conclusions

- Land use policy
- Partnership building
- Business development and entrepreneurship
- Workforce development and employment
- Health and environment
- Brownfield and infill redevelopment
- Transportation
- Infrastructure financing

If a Task and Finish Group is established they may wish to look at the cross cutting themes outlined above and the subsequent implications for their working arrangements as a priority to ensure that all aspects of the physical and environmental growth and the social, cultural and economic capital building are connected.

The Sandy Row area with its distinct boundaries and current and emerging place-based assets provides an ideal opportunity to consider piloting a smart growth approach to sustainability development which can be assessed by the HE and other strategic partners for future roll out across Northern Ireland. Sandy Row is in an ideal situation currently to enable social partners to pilot the economic growth strategy outlined in this report within a “focused space” and to evaluate the transferability to other locations throughout Northern Ireland in order to build on successes.

Conclusion 3: The right partners are in place for success. Engagement and participation can be enhanced.

Successful physical, environmental and economic development efforts rely on partnerships across public agencies private and social entrepreneurs, community organisations and key local stakeholders who live and work in the area, especially when different types of funding are involved.

Authentic engagement and participation is crucial to achieve the specific goals within the overall strategy for Sandy Row in the future. Recognising and promoting the capability of community representatives to advocate and negotiate in aspects of economic, physical and social development with a range of social partners could be assisted through the Urban Villages Initiative resourcing the Civic Stewardship scheme as a pilot in the area.

The key for success of such a scheme has already been suggested by the Urban Villages response in the consultations and referenced previously i.e. “all [my emphasis] social partners should be committed to the principles of Civic Stewardship and sustainability around specific interventions to ensure that delivery is built on shared priorities.”

Accountability for shared outcomes and priorities needs to be just that –shared. SRCF is already considering ways to measure and assess the progress against outcomes. Other partners also committing to be held accountable for their contribution to achieving agreed indicators of success could provide another innovative and truly collaborative approach to governance and accountability for the proposed growth strategy.

It is essential that communities have also set their own aligned goals. For the Sandy Row community a series of broad outcomes and measures of success have been identified in their “Sandy Row 2030” document. However, there may be a need to break this down into achievable indicators of success identified by the community, for the community to own and progress themselves with assistance from their social partners. The potential for Neighbourhood Stewards to be resourced is an exciting innovation which, aligned with the other aspects of the Civic Stewardship Scheme, could result in authentic engagement and equitable participation.

With a strong partnership in place represented in the Task and Finish Group the “missing bits “ of Sandy Row growth development can be addressed i.e. tackling the dereliction “the length of the Row”, the promotion of all that has been and will be achieved and the opportunities to create a vibrant “main street” are all feasible, accessible and desirable ensuring that Sandy Row does indeed become “the place in the city and region to live, work, visit and invest¹⁸” - the Sandy Row we all want.

It is hoped that the recommendations that follow can contribute both to the vision and the reality.

3.0 Recommendations



1. The setting up of a Task and Finish Group which will have a holding brief to ensure that the “bigger picture” information is shared and disseminated. It is recommended that government departments and agencies at regional and local level as appropriate nominate senior reporting officers, with decision making responsibilities to sit on this group alongside a number of community and other social partners.

2. The Task and Finish Group considers the tools and best practice models outlined in this report to ensure that all aspects of the physical and environmental growth and the social, cultural and economic capital building are connected.

3. Sandy Row is recognised, promoted and reviewed by connected statutory partners as a pilot definable focus area where there is already momentum for potential transformational change and examples of best practice.

4. The “missing bits” of Sandy Row’s growth strategy are addressed as a matter of priority.

5. All social partners commit to the principles and practice of Civic Stewardship assisted by the Urban Villages Initiative with resource support.

6. SRCF draw up their own goals and indicators of success to ensure that their 2030 outcomes are progressed.

7. The Housing Executive assists SRCF in the development of a resourced wider Housing Forum.

Thanks to...

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Belfast City Council

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

SRCF Residents & Member Organisations

Revitalise Business Partnership

Translink

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