

Democratic Services Section  
Legal and Civic Services Department  
Belfast City Council  
City Hall  
Belfast  
BT1 5GS



Belfast  
City Council

**REMOTE MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE**  
**LATE ITEM**

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

Members of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee will meet via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday, 9th June, 2021 at 5.15 pm, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

SUZANNE WYLIE

Chief Executive

**AGENDA:**

3. **Regenerating Places & Improving Infrastructure**

- (d) 'The Status Quo is not an Option': Building a Sustainable Belfast - Invitation to Speak (Pages 1 - 4)





Subject:	'The Status Quo is not an Option': Building a Sustainable Belfast – Invitation to Speak
Date:	9 <sup>th</sup> June, 2021
Reporting Officer:	Alistair Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Alistair Reid , Strategic Director of Place and Economy

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	To agree the participation of the Deputy Chairman of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee at 'The status quo is not an option': Building a sustainable Belfast event to held on Thursday, June 24 <sup>th</sup> 10.00 am -11.30am via Zoom.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4 <sup>th</sup> May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

	<p>1) Agree the participation of the Deputy Chairman of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in ‘The status quo is not an option’ event to be held on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> June; and</p> <p>2) Due to the time-frame of the event, agree, in accordance with Standing Order 47 (2) (b), that the decision would not be subject to call-in, on the basis that the decision was deemed to be a case of special urgency.</p>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
	<p><b><u>Background</u></b></p> <p>The Chief Executive has received an invitation to speak at the following event:</p> <p>3.1 ‘The status quo is not an option’: Building a sustainable Belfast on Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> June at 10.00 am – 11.30 am via Zoom.</p> <p>3.2 The event is hosted by The Town &amp; Country Planning Association, Dr Rory Hearne, Queen’s University Belfast’s School of Natural and Built Environment and Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR).</p> <p>3.3 The event aims to challenge the narrative around housing in contested spaces. The organisers state:</p> <p>3.4 <i>‘This event aims to challenge the narrative around housing in contested spaces: if we are to end homelessness and sectarianism we must create inclusive &amp; equitable, socially-, ecologically- and financially-sustainable neighbourhoods in these spaces. We invite you to join this conversation and to outline your vision for a non-sectarian Belfast.’</i></p> <p>3.5 The opportunity has been offered to the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee. The Deputy Chairman has agreed to accept the opportunity.</p>
3.6	<p><b><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>There are no finance or resource implications associated with this report.</p>
3.7	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs implications associated with this report.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents attached</b>
	Appendix 1 - Invitation to the Chief Executive, Belfast City Council



19<sup>th</sup> May 2021

**RE: Invite to Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive of Belfast City Council**

Dear Suzanne,

The Town & Country Planning Association, Dr Rory Hearne, Queen's University Belfast's School of Natural and Built Environment and Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR) cordially invite you to the following event:

***'The status quo is not an option': Building a sustainable Belfast***  
***Thursday June 24<sup>th</sup> 10-11.30am via Zoom***

This event aims to challenge the narrative around housing in contested spaces: if we are to end homelessness and sectarianism we must create inclusive & equitable, socially-, ecologically- and financially-sustainable neighbourhoods in these spaces.

We invite you to join this conversation and to outline your vision for a non-sectarian Belfast.

Please confirm if you would be willing to attend by return email. Please see the context statement attached. We can provide further information on the event in due course and would welcome the opportunity to provide you with a briefing in advance.

Yours sincerely,

**Dessie Donnelly**  
Director, PPR

**Hugh Ellis**  
Policy Director  
Town & Country Planning Association

**Dr Rory Hearne**  
Asst Professor at Maynooth University  
Author of '*Housing Shock: The Irish Housing Crisis and How to Solve it*'

**Dr Agustina Martire**  
Snr Lecturer in Architecture,  
School of Natural & Built Environment  
Queen's University Belfast

## ***'The status quo is not an option': Building a sustainable Belfast***

### **Context**

2021 marks the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Housing Executive. Both were inspired by a determination to promote equality and end the sectarianism dividing our communities, poisoning our public services and corrupting our government. Both have helped to shape a Belfast unrecognisable from the city they emerged from.

However, the discriminatory and sectarian patterns of the past stubbornly persist. Social housing need and homelessness continue to be overwhelmingly concentrated in poor Catholic communities while 'peace walls' continue to mark the sectarian demography of our city.

According to DfC / Housing Executive figures, 20 years of development would be needed to meet existing levels of housing need. Yet, acres of empty land adjacent to 'peace walls' preclude housing by policies designed to secure sectarian fault lines drawn during the conflict. These same undeveloped 'interfaces', effectively designed to act as 'buffer zones', attract sectarian disturbances over and over again - be they casualised and pre-arranged youth rioting or the cynical manipulation of working class youths in furtherance of wider political goals – like the recent NI Protocol linked riots.

Ongoing sectarian disturbances across our city are not grounds to maintain the policies of the past; they represent the abject failure of these policies 23 years into a peace process. 'Single identity communities' are a tragic remnant of our divided past created through pogroms and expulsions, they have no place shaping policies determining who can live where.

Belfast is an increasingly diverse city. Those in housing need represent a broad section of our residents: asylum seekers, refugees, single mothers, the elderly, people with disabilities, children in homeless hostels and more. We need policies which facilitate both equality and diversity.

Belfast is not immune either to the neo-liberal trend of privatisation of public land that is present throughout the world, deeply affecting housing provision. As the value of land rises, housing becomes less affordable. In transferring public land to private developers, as is happening in Belfast and other cities across NI, we can expect yet further segregation by class and income. We need to stop this process by keeping public land in public ownership and proposing alternative ways of housing development that will cater for those who most need it, while sustaining genuinely mixed, accessible, inclusive, and liveable communities.