

## **The Polish Heritage Flight Visit Proposal**

There are approximately 25,000 Polish people living in Northern Ireland currently. The majority of them are settled in the Greater Belfast area, including a large population living in East Belfast.

Since our arrival to Northern Ireland in 2004, we have made a vital contribution to the economic and cultural landscape of the country, becoming the most active and most visible ethnic minority group with Polish language being the second most spoken language in Northern Ireland at present. The Polish government in recent years has established a full-time diplomatic representation in Belfast operating from Malone Road.

There is also a historical link between Poland and Northern Ireland which dates back to the Second World War, when a number of Polish Airmen were based in Northern Ireland in a defence role in various RAF Squadrons, as well as, two Polish Air Force Squadrons operating from the RAF Ballyhalbert in Ards Peninsula. During this period, 15 Polish personnel lost their lives in Northern Ireland, including two Polish pilots who fatally crashed near RAF Sydenham (Belfast City Airport) in 1942. The graves of the Polish Airmen are scattered around the country with seven located at Milltown Cemetery in West Belfast.

In recent years, a number of murals dedicated to the shared history between Poland and Northern Ireland were erected in Belfast and the For Your Freedom & Ours shared history project delivered a number of OCN accredited Good Relations

programmes to over 1000 participants representing local communities. This programme was designed to help tackle issues related to integration and reduce levels of prejudice towards members of the largest ethnic minority group in Northern Ireland. Several groups that participated in the programme come from the Greater Belfast area, including Ballynafeigh Orange Hall, Ballynafeigh Historical and Cultural Society, Ballymac Friendship Club, ACTInnitiative South Belfast, Belfast South Community Resources and Fortwilliam Youth Centre.

In 2019, For Your Freedom & Ours started working on the Polish Wings Heritage Trail, bringing the forgotten history of the Polish Airmen in Northern Ireland to life in the form of an educational trail available online and physically to the wider public (map of the PWHT attached).

This year, to mark the centenary of Northern Ireland, as well as, to celebrate the relationship between the Polish and the Northern Irish communities, we propose to organise a 2 day visit by the Polish Heritage Flight to Northern Ireland with a ground event at the Newtownards airfield (subject to restrictions) and a flypast over several locations related to the history of the Polish Airmen in Northern Ireland.



The Polish Heritage Flight is a historical aircraft collection based in Duxford, flying the Hurricane and the Spitfire in the Second World War Polish Air Force markings.

During the visit the PHF will provide an aerial display over Belfast including the City Airport, Milltown Cemetery also flying over South, East and North Belfast. This display will be visible to thousands of spectators around Belfast.

Prior to the visit, we also propose delivering a series of talks explaining the history of the Polish Air Force in the Second World War and Northern Ireland. This series will be available to local communities either face to face or online. Such an approach would allow us to explain the historical connection between NI and Poland and foster relationships with the Polish community living in Belfast today.

To make the whole project successful, we have decided to create a partnership between For Your Freedom & Ours project, the Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Belfast, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Ards, Lisburn City Council and North Down Borough Council. All the mentioned above parties have agreed to support the programme and to participate in the budget.

We wish to ask Belfast City Council to become partners in the programme and to support the idea of bringing shared history to life with support of the Polish Heritage Flight.

As far as funding is concerned, the total budget needed for the two days programme is £15,000, which is why we are asking our partners to support it with small grants of £3,000 for the

aerial display and an additional £800 for the education element – talks on the history of the Polish Air Force.

The last time the Polish Air Force was visible over Northern Ireland was in 1945, so bringing the Hurricane and the Spitfire in Polish markings to Northern Ireland will be a significant way to celebrate the past and the present connections.

We also believe that such a project will have an impact on the Good Relations in the city; from our experience with delivering shared history programmes across Northern Ireland, such an educational approach plays a massive role in changing people's perspectives on the presence of the Polish community in Northern Ireland.

DRAFT Programme:

21<sup>st</sup> August

Flying Route:

Blackpool to Ballycarry to Carrickfergus to Newtownabbey to RAF Aldergrove to Glenavy to Belfast including Milltown Cemetery, City Airport and circle around the city to Lisburn to Newtownards

VIP event at Newtownards Airfield

22<sup>nd</sup> August

Ground Event open to the public at Ards Airfield

Flying Route: Ards to Bangor to Ballyhalbert to Ballycranbeg to Blackpool

More information:

For Your Freedom & Ours Programme

[www.facebook.com/wwiipolesni/](http://www.facebook.com/wwiipolesni/)

[www.tiwttter.com/wwiipolesni/](http://www.tiwttter.com/wwiipolesni/)

Polish Heritage Flight

<https://polishheritageflight.com/>