



**Minutes of the  
PEACE III Review Panel Meeting**

Friday 11 April 2008, 11.00am  
CRC Offices, Dungannon

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In Attendance:	Pat Colgan	SEUPB	(Chair)
	Matt Donnelly	Panel Member	
	Denis Galway	Panel Member	
	Peter Osbourne	Independent Panel Member	
	Adrian McNamee	SEUPB	(Secretariat)
	Lisa McMullan	SEUPB	(Secretariat)
	Ciaran Rice	SEUPB	(Secretariat)

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**1. Agree Agenda**

The agenda was agreed.

**2. Introductions**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and stated that this was the first meeting of the PEACE III Review Panel.

**3. Register of Interests/Conflicts of Interest**

The Independent Review Panel Member stated that he had recently undertaken work in relation to the Good Relations Strategy for Strabane District Council.

#### 4. Review

##### **The Review of the Mourne Link Project Ref: (000231).**

*Representatives from Strabane District Council and the Joint Technical Secretariat were invited to enter the room.*

In Attendance: Philip Faithful	Strabane District Council
Karen McClelland	Strabane District Council
Patrick O'Doherty	Strabane District Council
Councillor Jarlath Burns	Strabane District Council
Howard Keery	Joint Technical Secretariat
Brenda Hegarty	Joint Technical Secretariat

After relevant introductions were made, the Chair proceeded to outline the procedures to be followed at the review meeting. The project applicants were then invited to outline the reasons they felt the Mourne Link application should be funded.

A representative from Strabane District Council gave a presentation to the Panel. The main points from this presentation were as follows:

- The Mourne Link project complemented national, regional and local strategies and reflected the two member states communiqué to maximise the potential of the North West Region.
- The project would be located in a ward which was designated in the top 10 deprived wards in Northern Ireland. The area was also designated as a Neighbourhood Renewal Area.
- The Mourne Link project addressed both intra and inter community development. The project would meet the PEACE III Programme objective of targeting areas and groups that have been affected by the conflict and had experienced particular problems of “segregation”, “marginalisation” and “isolation”.
- The Mourne Link project was not just a bridge but would link the town and promote public art to support good relations through cultural diversity, freeing the public realm from displays of sectarian aggression, reclaiming recreational space for shared use, developing walking routes and harnessing the potential of community development and community relations work.
- The level of cross-community use of the Melvin Recreational Centre has increased both in relative and absolute terms as demonstrated by the independent economic appraisal. In 2003 only 3000 members of the Protestant community made use of the Melvin recreational facilities. This number increased to 6000 in 2005, rising to 8,650 in 2006.
- The two main schools in the area, Strabane Grammar School and Strabane High School had made a commitment to use the sporting

facilities on the Melvin site. In addition, all main churches and Derry and Raphoe Action Group (a local community network for Protestant groups) had been fully involved in the consultation process.

The Chair asked the project applicant to highlight specific grounds on which they felt the decision should be overturned.

A representative from Strabane District Council stated that the minutes of the Steering Committee meeting (05/02/08) had made reference to Castlederg as being the most deprived ward in Northern Ireland. He advised that this statement was factually incorrect as the Ballycolman/East wards are in the top ten most deprived wards in Northern Ireland.

*The Chair thanked Strabane District Council for outlining their points and invited the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) to respond.*

A representative from JTS advised that Measure 2.1 of the PEACE III Programme encouraged the development of a shared society. He stated that this Priority would ensure new opportunities for shared space were created and cited directly from the PEACE III Operational Programme as follows:

*“Greater Opportunity exists, therefore, to develop a shared society as one in which public spaces are shared by all members of that society. Creating new opportunities for shared space and addressing segregation, will contribute to developing a shared vision of society and the changing of attitudes and in so doing enhance reconciliation. These activities seek to reclaim public spaces for all sections of the community and will enable the emergence of vibrant, economically active and engaged communities”.*

*“This objective aims to regenerate urban, rural and border areas that appear derelict, segregated, underused, threatening and/or unwelcoming and transform them into shared spaces. The intervention seeks to tackle the problems of separation of communities within society and address the underlying problems of sectarianism , racism and prejudice by encouraging the development of physical environments that are not ‘marked out’ with symbols that define it as a territory of one side of a community but as open to and welcoming to all. By complementing processes and relationships established in Priority 1, this element of Priority 2 will provide funding for new shared public spaces and help address the issues of physical segregation as manifested by peace walls, sectarian graffiti, flags and emblems”.*

A representative from JTS stated that this was the context in which the Steering Committee had based their decision.

A representative from JTS advised that the total budget for Measure 2.1 (Creating Shared Public Spaces) was €82m. He informed the meeting that 126 expressions of interest had been received (€715 in total). He stated that of eleven applications considered for funding by the Steering Committee, only two had been successful.

A representative from JTS advised that although the initial assessment had scored the project in the very evident band in terms of the Peace and Reconciliation objective, the Steering Committee had revised this to the evident band.

A representative from JTS concluded by stating that the Steering Committee felt the project had not fully demonstrated a genuine use of shared space. In particular, the degree to which the Protestant community would benefit from a bridge essentially linking two nationalist communities was not evident.

*The Chair thanked the representatives from JTS for their comments and asked if the Review Panel had any questions.*

A Review Panel member noted that the idea for this project had first been considered in the 1970's and asked if the project applicant could outline why the project should be funded now. A representative from Strabane District Council advised that the project would open up the Melvin area of Strabane for use by both communities.

A Review Panel member pointed out that the proposed bridge would link two nationalist communities and asked if the project promoter could outline how Protestant usage would increase. A representative from Strabane District Council advised that the bridge would cater for pedestrians and cyclists and would be used by pupils from both Strabane Grammar School and Strabane High School. He stated that hockey was now regularly played at the Melvin sporting facilities.

A Review Panel member asked if the project had been included when the Strabane 2000 plan was drawn up. A representative from Strabane District Council confirmed that this was the case.

A Review Panel member asked how Protestant usage would be encouraged. A representative from Strabane District Council advised that currently, the Protestant community did not consider Strabane town centre to be a neutral space and advised that the bridge would help to address this issue.

A Review Panel member asked if the project applicant could outline how ex-prisoners would benefit from the Mourne Link project. A representative from Strabane District Council advised that ex-prisoners would make use of the facilities at Melvin Recreational Centre.

A Review Panel member asked if the project applicant could advise how the project would ensure that the issue of graffiti was adequately managed. A representative from Strabane District Council stated that in the past 7 years graffiti had been nearly completely removed from the Melvin site. She pointed out that the Council had worked closely with local community groups on this issue. On the issue of graffiti on the town side of the river, a representative from Strabane District Council advised that the problem had decreased significantly over the past 10 years.

A Review Panel member asked for clarification on the religious mix within the two wards. A representative from Strabane District Council stated the wards were mainly nationalist in their make up and advised that at present there was no incentive for the Protestant community to travel between wards.

A Review Panel member asked if the project applicant could outline the grounds on which the appeal had been submitted. A representative from Strabane District Council stated that they were appealing the decision on the basis that procedures had not been followed and the decision was not reasonable. Specifically, he advised that the project would link two of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland, and stated the Steering Committee minutes were factually incorrect regarding the Castlederg reference.

A Review Panel member asked if the project applicant could advise how the project would encourage greater involvement from the Protestant community in Strabane Town Centre. A representative from Strabane District Council stated the Protestant community would travel to use superior leisure facilities as shown by the increased usage by Protestants of the Melvin site since 2003.

A Review Panel member stated that the assessment notes had identified a need for clarity in the organisational structure of the Strabane Town Forum and the Melvin Reference Group.

A representative from JTS advised that the overall priority score of 13/20 reflected the overall level of consultation, and responses received from all main churches.

A Review Panel member stated that the assessment notes had highlighted that the bridge had the potential to challenge the polarisation between the Catholic and Protestant communities in Strabane. However, the assessment notes also advised that the project proposal did not adequately demonstrate the capacity to bring together the target groups of the PEACE III Programme. A representative from JTS stated that although the potential benefits of the project were recognised, the application did not sufficiently demonstrate how the project would achieve enhanced usage by the Protestant community.

A Review Panel member asked JTS for a justification of the reduction in scoring for Reconciliation and the PEACE III Legacy criteria when the economic appraisal had looked at these areas in a positive light. A representative from JTS stated that the project was aspirational in trying to ensure that Strabane Town Centre developed into a neutral space. However, the application had not demonstrated how the Protestant community would use the bridge as the majority of rural Protestants would drive to the Melvin site across the existing bridge. A representative from JTS also noted that the scores would have been lowered after the consultant who drafted the Economic Appraisal had been asked a series of questions by the Steering Committee.

A Review Panel member asked the project applicant to confirm the amount of funding that would be required. A representative from Strabane District Council confirmed that £1.1m from the PEACE III Programme would ensure that the project would go ahead, and advised that since the application was submitted £600,000 had been secured from Sustrans, thereby reducing the amount of PEACE III funding required.

The Chair asked the Project Promoters if they were happy with the way the Review Panel had been conducted, and if they felt they had been given the opportunity to convey all the main points of their argument. A representative from Strabane District Council confirmed that this was the case.

*The Project Promoter and JTS exited the room.*

The Chair asked the Panel for their comments on the Mourne Link project application.

A Review Panel member advised that the project didn't meet the programme objectives, but pointed out that representatives from the Protestant community had supported the application for funding and that small steps may be necessary before a genuine neutral shared space could be created.

A Review Panel member stated that in his opinion a score in between the JTS assessment and the score allocated by the Steering Committee was merited, but that this may not be enough to ensure the application was successful.

A Review Panel member advised that in his view the application had not demonstrated how Protestant usage would increase as a direct result of the Mourne Link project. A Review Panel member noted that the argument was not regarding the need for the Mourne Link project but with its fit with the PEACE III Programme objectives, and that this had not been sufficiently demonstrated. The Review Panel agreed with the JTS assessment that the Mourne Link project had not met the PEACE III Programme objectives.

The Review Panel agreed that the rationale for the reduction in the scoring should have been recorded more clearly in the Steering Committee minutes. The Review Panel recommended that this step should be put in place for future meetings.

The Review Panel agreed that the decision of the Steering Committee was reasonable, that the proper procedures had been followed and that the issues raised did not materially impact on the Steering Committee decision.

The Review Panel agreed with the decision of the Steering Committee and the decision was upheld.

#### **5. Any Other Business**

None.

#### **6. Conclusion**

The Chair thanked the Review Panel members for attending and informed them that the Managing Authority, on behalf of the Review Panel, will inform in writing both the project applicant and JTS advising them of the Review Panel's decision. He also stated that the minutes from the meeting would be e-mailed to Review Panel members in due course.