



Northern Ireland Youth Forum

Consultation Response

Crusaders FC & Partners proposals for the Loughside site

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Youth Forum (NIYF) is a youth led organisation dedicated to promoting the voice of young people. We have a particular interest in ensuring that young people from a wide range of backgrounds have the opportunity to contribute to decisions that are important to them.

Members of the NIYF staff team engaged with members to seek their views on the proposed stadium development in North Belfast as put forward by Crusaders Football Club.

Before the consultation took place young people were briefed with details of the proposals.

Details of the proposed shared space were circulated.

4 groups of young people came forward from NIYF's membership and took part in workshops during the month of October 2014:

- Members of NIYF Executive Committee
- Members of the NI Youth Congress
- Members of the UK Youth Parliament
- Members of the Champions 4 Change Project

In total 35 young people fed into this consultation; the majority of whom were from North Belfast.

Methodology

Focus groups were used as the primary methodology for this consultation.

At the focus group sessions young people were presented with the background; rationale; proposals; and artwork in relation to the proposed development.

They were asked to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the proposals. The participants were broken into smaller working groups and asked to feed back as a wider group following discussion.

Findings

Generally young people were supportive of the concept of a shared space that they could use for sporting; recreational; educational and commercial reasons. They discussed the potential for jobs at the facility. Whilst sport was a big attraction for many young people – the Educational Hub was perhaps the area that provoked the most discussion.

'Somewhere to go; Something to Do':

Young people reflected upon the need for safe affordable space for young people to socialise and referred to previous studies, that engaged with a total of 1,649 young people carried out by Northern Ireland Youth Forum over recent years:

- 'What We Want' Report (2009): 939 young people
- Big Deal, Priorities for Youth Consultation (December 2009): 114 young people
- North Foreshore Consultation (March 2010): 12 young people
- Priorities for Youth Consultation, (November 2012): 119 young people
- NIYF Have Your Say Day (June 2013): 84 young people
- DARD Action Planning (2013): 41 young people
- Valley Park Shared Space Consultation (2014): 153 young people
- 'Be Heard' consultation (2014): 187 young people

In these pieces of work NIYF specifically sought the views of young people that were not involved in youth services as well as young people that may be considered to be socially excluded, vulnerable or marginalised.

Young people consistently identified 'places to go' and 'things to do' as the most important factors that would improve their life experience. It was important to young people that these places and activities were available in the evenings and at weekends and were affordable. They should also give the young people the opportunity to 'hang out' and meet other young people.

The Young People consulted as part of the Loughside consultation alluded to many of the same issues as outlined in the reports above.

Young people felt that through projects like Loughside could impact upon risk taking behavior often expressing a concern that they had no place in their communities in which they could go to feel safe; many simply wanted a place to go where they could hang out with their mates.

In addition to this, there was a strong feeling that 'having nothing to do' made them vulnerable to experimenting with criminal activity.

Sporting focus:

During this consultation young people discussed various elements of the proposals. The young people who responded were of mixed gender and religion and the majority of young people did not describe themselves as 'sporty'.

Members of the group expressed concern that phases one and two appeared to be sport and male focused. Young people discussed potential additions that they could make to cater for females and older people.

Some of the ideas that were suggested were:

- A dance studio – to cater for 'younger and older' dance styles;
- Alternative therapies;

- 'Putting Fight For Peace Programmes in there';*
- Fab Labs; **
- Youth Support Services;
- Sports Hall with Climbing wall, indoor tennis, badminton, indoor football, unihock, netball, Gaelic Games etc;
- The sports hall will also be able to facilitate Music Events; Youth Conferences and Seminars etc;
- Kitchen / café area: healthy, nutritious food and drinks;
- Mentor rooms: mentoring support, counselling, advice provision (demand led), wrap around services;
- Recreation area: pool, table football, small games;
- Enterprise zone (informal education, IT and exploring learning);
- Chill Out Zone, meeting, relaxing, eating, drinking, being entertained areas;
- Free Wi Fi

Free Wifi has become increasingly important to young people given the developments in terms of social media; mobile phones; tablets etc. Young people often congregate in areas where Wifi is available as a result.

* Fight For Peace is a methodology developed in Rio De Janeiro focusing on marginalised young people and the use of Boxing / MMA and Youth Work Methodologies to effect change (<http://www.fightforpeace.net/>)

** Fab Labs are a creative technology / ICT based educational facility based in the community and has proven hugely successful across the globe

Accessibility:

Young people were encouraged to discuss if this facility would be somewhere that they would want to go at weekends (during periods that are associated with risk taking behaviour); some of the girls consulted outlined that as it stands they would not use the facility at these times, but that they would go to it and be willing to travel to it if it included things like a dance studio; somewhere for 'all ages music events' or had a safe space where young people could socialise.

The location itself was another key area of discussion. For those from PUL communities, perhaps unsurprisingly there were no major barriers apart from transport infrastructure. For young people from CNR areas there were some concerns raised about accessibility.

There was a consensus that the community would like to use the facilities and that once the development was completed it was hoped that people from the wider community would use it; however the young people were concerned that this aspiration may never become a reality. There were concerns about safety, accessibility and perceived community ownership.

Many of the young people raised concerns that because of the location of the new development they may feel excluded because it was too close to Mount Vernon.

The young people from Nationalist / Republican backgrounds suggested that their parents would be concerned for their safety, as they would view the site as a predominately loyalist / unionist area. Young people also queried the accessibility of the site during 'bonfire season'.

A number of young people discussed the 'Cricky' at length and the redevelopment there. It was suggested that there should be linkage between the two sites and the inclusion of Gaelic games as well as an indoor facility would be of major benefit.

Young people advocated strongly for the site to be promoted as cross community. There was concern however that without adequate transport infrastructure to support the facility it would be difficult for the CNR community to access it. It was suggested that wider community sector buy in would be required and that a great deal of political leadership would be beneficial as 'if our politicians can stop coming across as so sectarian, people may have less fear'. (young person aged 16)

The issue of transport was discussed quite a bit; but generally young people agreed that they would be willing to pay for quality transport; especially if the site had facilities that they wanted to use.

Young people felt that the inclusion of a Youth Zone would be positive, as part of the Educational Hub. It was felt that this could incorporate some of the additional facilities suggested and that this may help make the site more accessible.

General Comments

What do you like about proposals?

- Incorporates education and sport
- Cross community
- For everyone
- Promoting health and fitness
- Development of socially and economically deprived area
- Gets jobs
- Sport village

What would you change or think could be improved?

- Inclusion of a 'Youth Zone'
- Accessibility
- Incorporate all sports, not just a select – e.g Gaelic Games
- Kind of exclusive
- More for females
- Community transport e.g. mini buses
- Less sports friendly
- Very cold
- Open more to other cross community groups
- Put in a gym

Who would use the facilities? Is there anyone excluded?

- OAP's excluded
- Disabled sports
- Mainly males
- Catholic community

What are the barriers to using these facilities?

- Social/sectarian divides
- Transport
- Acceptance
- If not interested in football
- Cant play sport