

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE JUSTICE MINISTER



Department of
Justice

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

Mánnystrie O tha Laa

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Ryan Black
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City and Neighbourhood Services Department
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2 November 2020

Dear Ryan,

Thank you for your letter of 7th September seeking the Department's support of Council, in partnership with the Department for Infrastructure and Department for Communities, in efforts to co-ordinate support and assistance for residents and groups who would like to transform and regenerate communal space throughout the city. Let me apologise for the delay in responding. Your correspondence references alleyways throughout Belfast in particular and acknowledges the difficulties that establishing ownership of these often unadopted entries can create.

At the outset, let me state that I have nothing but admiration for the activists, neighbours, community leaders and elected representatives who have worked with local residents and agencies to transform a number of city entries into 'wildflower alleys' and other aesthetically pleasing and usable space across Belfast. I am well aware that such

spaces are normally quite sterile and uninviting strips of land between homes that back on to one another, that can often act as a focus for anti-social behaviour.

From my Department's perspective, there are obvious benefits to be derived from such community-driven initiatives in terms of creating passive surveillance, potentially tackling anti-social behaviour, engendering community cohesion and improving community safety.

Although not quite in the same space, the Department has used its powers in the past to assist Council when alley gates have been sought by residents to prevent access due to anti-social behaviour, but usually this is limited to interface areas and precedes adoption of the gates by Council. On a small number of occasions we have agreed to fund such measures, albeit this has usually been on the recommendation of policing colleagues for express and pressing community protection needs.

Without prejudice to the decision making structures in place, I would imagine that the sort of support package for residents you envisage is something that Policing and Community Partnerships, funded by the Department and Policing Board, may wish to be involved in, given the community safety benefits mentioned above. Gathering and sharing the experiences of those who have delivered such schemes, along with some technical assistance and guidance, could well assist neighbours contemplating embarking on such a journey.

You will also be familiar with the work of the Department's Interfaces Team. As part of confidence building measures in interface areas, the Department has been able to make a modest contribution to transforming community space at interfaces and is working at present on a number of potential 'meanwhile use' schemes to remove the blight caused by unkempt derelict sites at interface locations. Departmental officials have encountered some of the same problems you highlight in terms of establishing ownership of land and the requirements that need to be met to bring this land up to an

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adoptable standard. Such work often generates partnership working with colleagues in DfI and DfC; which helps reinforce the logic of the Council's proposition.

In closing, I am happy for my Department to be engaged in supporting Council's aspirations around this issue. Our direct responsibility is perhaps slightly tangential to Council's, with your remit for responding to problems such as fly-tipping and a range of other operational considerations, but we would welcome an opportunity to work alongside Departmental colleagues from DfI and DfC to hopefully derive the community benefits that are undoubtedly possible from alleyway transformation. In the first instance I would suggest that you contact Michael McAvoy, Head of Interfaces and PCSPs at the Department to initiate follow-up action.

A copy of this letter goes to the Communities Minister and to the Infrastructure Minister.

Yours sincerely



NAOMI LONG MLA
Minister of Justice