

St Patrick's Day Outdoor Event 2006
Monitoring Report

Institute of Irish Studies
Queen's University Belfast

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Executive Summary

On 4th July 2005 BCC agreed to fund and organise the 2006 St Patrick's Day event.

The Council agreed that:

- It should take the lead role in planning, designing and delivering an inclusive outdoor event to mark St Patrick's Day in 2006 as a key event within the 'Celebrate Belfast' programme;
- The event should be held in Custom House Square, a purpose built entertainment space, which is fully serviced and designed with outdoor events in mind;
- The same terms and conditions and site management processes that apply to all other current Council events should apply to the 2006 St. Patrick's Day event;
- The Council should commit the sum of £70,000 towards the event, in addition to the sum of £25,000 being awarded by the Arts Council;
- The 2006 event should be run as a pilot, to be evaluated independently by an appropriate person/body with relevant professional expertise, to assess its potential to become an annual event within the Council's events calendar.

The Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University was approached in January 2006 to undertake the independent evaluation and produce a report of findings for the Council. The Institute was asked to assess:

- To what degree St Patrick's Day 2006 events in Belfast, funded by the City Council, offered opportunities for all sections of communities to become involved
- To place this in the context of the history of St Patrick's Day celebrations in Belfast since 1998 as well as the limitations placed upon organisers in preparing for the event.
- The potential for future publicly funded St Patrick's Day events.

Conclusions

1. The Carnival occurred in a relatively tense political atmosphere, in which the Council's message of inclusiveness was largely ignored by commentators.
2. This year's St Patrick's Day Carnival in Belfast was not a fully inclusive event, but neither was it an exclusive, intimidating one. There was little evidence of a substantial attendance from Protestant communities. Using our onsite survey as a rough indicator, only 31 of 257 (or 12%) people surveyed indicated that they were Protestant.
3. Those attending the event, including those from the Protestant community, generally indicated that they viewed it positively. The majority of respondents to our onsite survey thought the event was welcoming and a family day out. This overall positive perception of the event was characteristic of Protestants as well as Catholics.
4. Protestants did tend to express dissatisfaction with the presence of political symbols and some reported that they felt uncomfortable at the event. Although as noted above, reactions to the level of political symbols was mixed for Catholics as well as Protestants, on average Protestants expressed greater dissatisfaction. Moreover, although 45% of Protestants reported feeling comfortable at the event, 29% reported feeling uncomfortable.
5. The number of political symbols on display at the event was lower than in previous years and low in absolute terms.
6. Although briefed to 'persuade and encourage' individuals to replace political symbols at CHS stewards were not successful in this task.
7. The strategy of BCC to introduce alternative symbols (in the form of St Patrick's Carnival Shamrock t-shirts, Cross of St Patrick and multicoloured shamrock flags) was a partial success.
8. This year, nationalists have demonstrated a willingness to curb the number of political symbols at the event.
9. With the short time-frame, there were organisational as well as political difficulties in delivering an inclusive event.
10. Despite these factors, the Council would appear to have gone some way towards creating the welcoming environment in which a properly inclusive event could take place in the future.

11. More broadly, public opinion does not appear to be as polarised as media and political commentary suggests and some latitude for cooperation between the communities exists.
12. Protestant community groups have already demonstrated some willingness to take part within forums such as the Beat Initiative's steering group.
13. The message of inclusiveness now needs to be promoted and the Good Relations strategy actively pursued if BCC wishes to take the event forward.

Recommendations

Planning Issues

1. Provide a longer period for planning and preparation for the Carnival events.
2. Facilitate long-term networking between organisers and participating groups, especially with community groups in Protestant areas.
3. Take advantage of the event occurring at the weekend in 2007 and 2008.
4. St Patrick's Day should be made a public holiday.
5. Consider courting sponsorship for next year.

Media

6. In order to reconstruct the debate in favour of inclusiveness, BCC should actively promote its own message of good relations and shared space, against other opinions of the event.
7. This requires a positive message which promotes inclusiveness rather than a 'watering down' of a nationalist event.
8. Any regulation of symbols should be accompanied by a clear rationale of 'shared space' to prevent misinterpretation of the policy as being anti-Irish.
9. Realistic goals for the inclusiveness of the event need to be agreed beforehand. Establishing clear criteria by which the inclusiveness of the event can be judged would help prevent conflicting interpretations of the event afterwards.
10. The press should be encouraged to take a more responsible attitude when reporting the Carnival.

Symbols

12. Dressing the concert area to give a green and white theme to the entire event would make political symbols less obvious.
13. More, and larger, Council flags should be distributed as a positive and highly visible alternative to any political symbols. These could be made freely available at City Hall to undercut street sellers.
14. The Council could consider promoting the green shamrock as a positive symbol with appeal to both Catholics and Protestants. The City Council might consider investing in a logo incorporating 'Belfast' and 'the Shamrock' to brand the event in the city over a number of years.
15. BCC should liaise with appropriate sports organisations regarding the use of sports shirts as sectarian symbols.

1. Terms of Reference

- 1.1 On 4th July 2005 BCC agreed to fund and organise the 2006 St Patrick's Day event. The Council agreed that the 2006 event should be run as a pilot, to be evaluated independently by an appropriate person/body with relevant professional expertise, to assess its potential to become an annual event within the Council's events calendar.

The Institute of Irish Studies was approached in January 2006 to undertake the independent evaluation and produce a report of findings for the Council.

1.2 Evaluation Aims:

- To assess to what degree St Patrick's Day 2006 events in Belfast, funded by the City Council, offer opportunities for all sections of communities to become involved
- To place this in the context of the history of St Patrick's Day celebrations in Belfast since 1998 and the limitations placed upon organisers in preparing for the event.
- To explore the potential for future publicly funded St Patrick's Day events.

The evaluation of the parade/carnival and stage presentations funded by Belfast City Council in 2006 will cover the following areas:

1. A brief history of the event to provide context for the evaluation (including an overview of previous evaluations).
2. A brief discussion of the issues common in organising major public events.

3. A review of the guidelines, mechanisms, and plans put in place for St Patrick's Day 2006 in Belfast.
4. A small attitude survey to give some indication of the perceptions that surround the events, particularly those within a Protestant constituency.
5. An overview of the events which take place on March 17th 2006, including looking at issues of stewarding, the use of flags and emblems, alcohol and street trading.
6. An examination of press reports before and after the event.
7. An evaluation of the success of the event in terms of inclusiveness, given the limitations discussed, and suggestions that may take the event forward in future years.

2. Methods

- **Literature Review:** A general review of the theoretical background concerning public rituals was conducted, with a specific focus on the use of symbols. In addition, the relevant legislation and policy documents pertaining to the St Patrick's Day event were collated.
- **Interviews with stakeholders:** Twenty interviews with all of the main political and community groupings with an interest in this year's St Patrick's Day event were conducted.
- **Newspaper coverage analysis:** Press coverage in the main local daily and Sunday newspapers was monitored and archived throughout the period of the evaluation. This was supplemented by the BCC's own newspaper archive of coverage of the event.
- **Postal survey:** In order to assess popular opinion of the event beyond the media, a small scale survey was conducted in two strategically selected areas of Belfast resulting in 76 completed questionnaires.
- **Monitoring of events:** On the day of the event a team of ten observers was tactically placed around the procession route and Custom House Square. Observers recorded the events as they took place by taking notes, photographs, and video footage. Observers also performed systematic counts of those in attendance as well as of political symbols.
- **Onsite survey:** Two teams of researchers were placed along the route of the procession and at Custom House Square to distribute questionnaires to onlookers. This resulted in 257 completed forms.
- **Television coverage analysis:** Four television reports of the event were recorded and analysed.

3. Rituals, Symbols and St Patrick's Day

Why is public ritual important?

3.1 This section seeks to provide some theoretical background as to why public ritual and celebrations, such as Belfast city's St. Patrick's Day celebration, attains such an important role in civic life. It will discuss how public ritual, instead of creating a sense of a unified community is more often a site of conflict and acrimony as competing groups seek control over the meaning, economic resources and performance of the ritual. Indeed, it is fair to say that St. Patrick's Day celebrations across the globe are typically characterised by profound intra-community acrimony - by battles over power, fights over who gets to retell the story, and from which position. This is contrary to its common image as a benign, cosmopolitan, and inclusive celebration of community and identity, as evinced in the oft-quoted statement, 'on St. Patrick's Day everybody is Irish for the Day',

Ritual and Community Identity

3.2 **Public ritual can help create a sense of community for groups.** Theoretically, this has been most clearly elaborated in what Victor Turner (1969) called the "communitas". The communitas is the construction of a relatively undifferentiated community, or even communion of equal individuals. The process of communitas moves always to universality and ever greater unity, an identification among members which is so absolute as to be tantamount to the stripping away of all the social problems which would otherwise divide and distinguish them (Cohen 1985: 55).

3.3 Public spectacle and ritual can thus provide a form of social glue which holds a community together. For groups characterised by divisive hierarchical roles (ethnicity, religion, class, gender, age) the performance of public spectacle can issue unified sentiments and redress corrosive conflict within the community. Ritual, in this sense, is viewed as particularly important in the construction of a unified collectivity because of its capacity to strengthen social identity and people's sense of geographical location, the very means through which they

experience community (Cohen 1985: 50). Consider New York's St. Patrick's Day, west London's Notting Hill Carnival, New Orleans's Mardi Gras in order to gain an insight into how these public celebrations strive to celebrate a unified community located in a specific geographical place

- 3.4 Ritual and public spectacle are also often used by social elites in an effort to preserve and defend their powerful position over subordinate groups by stressing that power and hierarchical differences are normal and even timeless. These rituals attempt to clearly outline and help preserve the power-relations in a society. Such rituals are typically highly formalised and replete with hierarchical roles, which seek to reproduce social ideals through disciplined performance and by eradicating ambiguity.

Why do groups care about ritual?

- 3.5 **Whilst public ritual and spectacle can help imagine a unified community, ritual is also typically characterised by conflict and political struggle.** This political struggle often involves competing groups seeking to claim ownership over the meaning, economy and performance of the ritual. Rather than a homogeneous phenomenon (i.e. the expression of a unified community) public ritual and spectacle is culturally and historically polymorphic.
- 3.6 Public ritual, in Abner Cohen's (1993: xi) phrase, is 'masquerade politics', in which politics is covertly articulated. What is at stake for participants fighting over the meaning of celebrations is that the celebrations expose, in a veiled form, the opposition, confrontation, subversion, and resistance that outlines the differential access to resources and power that defines these actors' social and political positions. In other words, because there is so much at stake in the control of public spectacle (temporary dominance of public space, mass media coverage, the allocation of economic resources, an opportunity to present your side of the story) public celebrations are an extremely important site to gain political mastery over.
- 3.7 **Public spectacle always involves contestation.** This contestation is not exclusively expressed through direct political confrontation and violence

between groups; conflicting groups struggle to express celebrations as having a particular identity. Take for example the New Orleans Mardi Gras. Multinational sponsors, local government, tourist companies, business leaders and African-American cultural-political groups all define the celebration differently. This divergence of opinion has led to conflict between Mardi Gras organisers and performers. Conflict has most especially arisen at Mardi Gras over whether 'traditional' performances of nudity are suitable for a civic celebration. This articulation of difference regarding the way in which public celebration should be performed is essentially 'a conflict of nomination' (Melucci 1996: 161): 'a conflict over the meaning of words and things in a society in which the name to an increasing degree supplants reality'. The manner in which we nominate things, according to Melucci (1996), has the power to determine their very existence.

3.8 St. Patrick's Day celebrations (often marked by the wearing of the green, drinking alcohol, huge public parades and church attendance) appear at face value to be a form of public spectacle which creates an inclusive brand of Irishness. Many parade organisers and sponsors of celebrations actively encourage the idea that St. Patrick's Day is a palimpsest celebration or a neutral grid on which a range of narratives of Irishness can be established. The seeming inclusivity incarnate in St. Patrick's Day Celebrations allow historians Cronin and Adair to note with a degree of satisfaction that "St. Patrick's Day does not appear particularly tribal" (2002: xv).

3.9 St. Patrick's Day celebrations across the globe are also often highly rancorous. Notably, rather than presuming St. Patrick's day spectacles are a neutral grid on which social differences are disregarded, contemporary imaginings of ethnic and national identities are cause for conflict. It is thus typical that St. Patrick's Day celebrations are characterised by 'conflicts of nomination', the struggle to define the meaning and character of St. Patrick's Day Celebrations. Rarely characterised by straightforward inclusivity, St. Patrick's Day Celebrations are often driven by intra-event strife, a dynamic tension between inclusiveness and exclusiveness, consensus and discord, conflict and alliance.

3.10 Even in events like the New York City celebrations, where a monolithic Irish-American community is often imagined, different narrations of the Irish-American community come together to construct differences, for example in 1991 when the Irish Lesbian and Gay Association was prohibited from marching by The Ancient Order of Hibernians, the parade organisers. For slave descendants on the island of Montserrat in the Caribbean, St. Patrick's Day commemorates a slave revolt in 1768, when the slavemasters were gathered together to commemorate the Patron Saint of Ireland. The reinvention of the island as another 'emerald isle' for tourists, with a six-day long St. Patrick's Day celebration becoming the focus for tourism, has come into conflict with islanders who claim that the festivities obscure the island's slave past. In London, the instigation in 2002 of a major St. Patrick's celebration (routed through central London and funded by the Greater London Authority as a celebration of 'multicultural London') was beset by conflict between some London-Irish groups who wanted the spectacle to represent a celebration of local London-Irish identity and multinational sponsors who wanted to use the festivities to advertise and sell alcoholic beverages.

Symbols and Public Ritual

3.11 **Public ritual is an important space for the defining and redefining of symbols.** The appearance of symbols, such as flags, banners and placards at public rituals, is indicative of groups trying to mark the identity of celebrations. Large gatherings can also act as powerful emotional moments during which symbols can be used to act against opposing groups. The parading of the Irish Tricolour or the Union Jack can, provoke offence in certain contexts, by acting to exclude groups who may view the symbols as threatening. They are not simply national flags.

3.12 **Symbols in themselves do not have any intrinsic, 'natural' meaning.** The context of a symbol's meaning is given in part by the social field into which it is incorporated, the practices which it articulates and is made to resonate. What matters is not the intrinsic or historically fixed objects of a culture, but the state

of play in cultural relations. In other words, it is groups working in a political framework who impart meaning into symbols.

3.13 The meaning of symbols is also subject to diverse interpretations. Symbols are multivocal, that is they have layers of meaning. They do not communicate a single proposition, but rather a collection of propositions, ideas and emotions. Different people will read different meanings in the same symbol. A person may see a number of meanings in the same symbol. The Red Hand of Ulster can be viewed as a loyalist emblem, a GAA badge, or the crest of the O'Neill family.

3.14 The meaning of symbol can change over time. They can change, sometimes dramatically, depending on how they are used and who uses them. St. Patrick is a good example of this. In the late eighteenth century St. Patrick was part of official British and Protestant state symbolism. By the middle of the nineteenth century St. Patrick was predominantly a figure of identification with Irish Roman Catholic Nationalists.

3.15 **Northern Ireland provides a perfect example of how St. Patrick has become a focus of diverse meanings.** In Ireland St. Patrick is a saint who has been recognised and celebrated by both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches since the sixteenth-century. During the Reformation St. Patrick became coloured by sectarian interests (Walker 1996) when both churches sought to trace their lineage directly back to the saint. The Roman Catholic Church made a concerted attempt to link the achievements of Patrick with the sanction of Rome and the Pope's subsequent consecration of Patricius further confirmed the connection. The Protestant Church of Ireland, on the other hand, focused its energy on tracing its local origins to Patrick (Cronin and Adair 2002:xxviii). In more recent times, reflecting the growing spirit of the ecumenical and rapprochement movements, St. Patrick has been identified as a shared symbol for Irish Christians with mixed faith parades and church services in Downpatrick Northern Ireland, the reputed burial site for Patrick.

3.16 One reason for the contested nature of St. Patrick's Day is that St. Patrick himself appears to be something of a portmanteau figure: his 'essential' meaning

being prone to conflicting representations. Indeed few facts, exist about Patrick. Historians dispute not only the historical detail and religious meaning of Patrick's life, but whether there may have been as many as five 'Patricks' or perhaps none at all. What information we have on St. Patrick largely appears in the form of myth and legend, which is rich in Christian allegory. The story, for instance, that Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland, an allegory of the defeat of paganism, or St. Patrick's usage of the shamrock to explain the paradox of the Holy Trinity derives from testimonies such as the *Confessio*, his spiritual autobiography. This mostly concerns internal rather than external experience. Much of what is reported about the life of St. Patrick is taken from historians, (such as Muirchú, who wrote centuries after his death) and was often a hybrid concoction of historical fact dispersed with allusion and metaphor.

3.17 St. Patrick, as Harrison (2002) observes, is thus the type of symbol which is often the focus of "proprietary rights". Similar to cultural appropriation, this refers to the struggle of competing groups 'to monopolize ethnic identities and their symbols, and with struggles across ethnic boundaries for the control of heritage and cultural property' (Harrison 2002). The focus of vying groups proclaiming ownership over its putative essential meaning, acrimony surrounding St. Patrick's Day refutes the assumption that an affiliation to mutual symbols 'is necessarily a source of social cohesion' (Harrison 2002: 211). Instead, 'shared cultural symbolism can give rise to competition over its ownership or use, and that this competition can play an important role in defining ethnic boundaries' (Harrison 2002: 211).

3.18 **Conclusions:**

What does theory about ritual and symbols tell us about St. Patrick's Day Celebrations in Belfast?

- Because there is so much at stake in public celebrations (public money, media visibility, control over public space), multiple groups strive to claim ownership over events.

- Conflicts over public events is common around the world and attempting to resolve differences inherent in events is very often a role played by legal or civic authorities.
- Public ritual should not be seen as peripheral to political debates but as a fundamental part of people's emotional attachment, as individuals, to political/cultural groups and communities.
- We should not lose sight of the idea that ritual can be perceived and interpreted in different ways by individuals and groups.

4. Relevant Policy Documents and Legislation

A number of policy documents and pieces of legislation are relevant to the St Patrick's Day event in Belfast

Legislation

4.1 Section 75 of the *Northern Ireland Act 1998*

75. - (1) A public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity-

(a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; (b) between men and women generally; (c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and (d) between persons with dependants and persons without.

(2) Without prejudice to its obligations under subsection (1), a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

4.2 If one considers the Carnival and Custom House Square event as a working environment then it may come under the **Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998** which makes discrimination on the grounds of religious belief and political opinion unlawful both in the work place and in the provision of goods, facilities and services. The Fair Employment Code of Practice states that employers are required to identify any practices that do not provide equality of opportunity (1.1.2). They should:

Promote a good and harmonious working environment and atmosphere in which no worker feels under threat or intimidated because of his or her religious belief or political opinion, e.g. prohibit the display of flags, emblems, posters, graffiti, or the circulation of materials, or the deliberate articulation of slogans or songs which are likely to give offence or cause apprehension among particular groups of employees. (5.2.2)

The Code of Practice suggests that Employers take affirmative action by considering:

ending displays at the workplace of flags, emblems, posters, graffiti, or the circulation of materials, or the deliberate articulation of slogans or songs which are likely to give offence to, or cause apprehension among, any one section of the population.

Policy Documents

4.3 In 2001 the **Community Relations Council** produced *Guidelines for a Cultural Diversity Policy: an Advocacy Document*. This recommended that events should have:

- Widely accepted location
- Inclusivity and broad participation
- Evident commitment to encouraging understanding and celebrating cultural diversity
- Avoidance of use of symbols or signage that may be regarded as offensive or triumphalist
- Event management and stewarding according to best practice standards.

4.4 **Belfast City Council's** *Good Relations Strategy* of February 2004 included the following statements:

‘Our vision of this Good Relations Strategy is for a stable, tolerant, fair and pluralist society, where individuality is respected and diversity is celebrated, in an inclusive manner.’

‘In Belfast’s highly segmented social pattern there are no quick fixes and even discussion about religion, politics or race becomes a very sensitive issue. People are very unwilling to raise issues of division and conflict when unsure of the background and views of others.’

Public bodies, including the Council, have largely accepted this reality and have developed a systematic response to living with division, creating a neutral work environment and providing services according to traditional community boundaries. This, however, inevitably results in the embedding of these divisions in an institutional form.’

- 4.5 In March 2005 the **Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister** produced *A Shared Future* a policy and strategic framework document for Good Relations in Northern Ireland. *A Shared Future* includes the following statements:

Section 1.2 Aims and Objectives

1.2.2 Policy objectives (including)

Facilitate the development of a shared community where people wish to learn, live, work and play together

Support cultural projects which highlight the complexity and overlapping nature of identities and their wider global connections

Section 1.4 Fundamental Principles

1.4.1 Separate but equal is not an option. Parallel living and the provision of parallel services are unsustainable both morally and economically

- 4.6 Of direct relevance is **Belfast City Council’s** *Terms and Conditions of Entry to Events* (Appendix I). In relation to symbols these state:

Flags, emblems or paraphernalia of a political, sectarian, racist or partisan nature will not be permitted on site.

- 4.7 In addition **Laganside Corporation**, owners of the Custom House Square site, state:

Flags, emblems, posters. All such material, including those of a political or sectarian nature, is ABSOLUTELY forbidden in ALL circumstances on the Corporation’s premises.

5. St Patrick's Day Belfast: Background

March 1998 The first St Patrick's Day festival at Belfast city centre was held. Festival organisers barred uniformed bands, party political banners and political speeches, however, the predominance of nationalist symbolism allied with the starting points for the parades to the city centre helped create the impression that this was a republican celebration.

The News Letter reported the display of flags representing the Republican prisoners' group Saoirse. Unionists also claimed that there had been sectarian attacks on Protestant children by those attending the City Hall event. At the same time Nationalists claimed that the event was very successful.

Following the 1998 celebration political and popular debate in the media highlighted the gulf in interpretation of what was entailed in expressions of Irishness, how this should be represented in any St Patrick's Day celebration and, in particular, the use of the Tricolour.

May 1998 Belfast City Council organised a meeting of community groups from across Belfast to discuss plans for the following year. The meeting agreed that the event had great potential to promote tourism in Belfast and that the name of the event would be changed to the St Patrick's Day Carnival. It was proposed that a number of processions from across the city should meet up at the City Hall. On the sensitive issue of flag displays it noted;

It was agreed that to censor flags, of any type, could be counter-productive and nugatory but it was agreed that the official flag for the carnival should be a St Patrick's flag with Belfast City Council tourism promotion logo superimposed. These flags would be distributed to participants and spectators as a promotional item for the event. As was the case this year no political slogans or emblems would be permitted in the parade. (Belfast City Council minutes E657)

July 1998 A further meeting of community groups was attended by representatives of organisations from both Protestant and Catholic areas of Belfast and by a representative from the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities. This meeting concluded that accommodation could be reached which would allow greater cross-community participation in 1999 although it was still likely that a smaller proportion of people from the Protestant community would be involved. A successful parade in 1999 could, however, lead to a bigger and more representative parade in 2000.

12 August 1998 The Tourism and Promotion of Belfast sub-committee held a meeting to discuss plans for the 1999 St Patrick's Day celebrations. The meeting was generally optimistic in tone and it was agreed to establish a Steering Committee composed of representatives of roughly equal numbers of organisations from Protestant and Catholic areas. The Council sub-committee also agreed to provide £50,000 to cover part of the cost of organising the celebrations.

9 November 1998 The St Patrick's Day Celebrations Committee agreed that the theme of the celebrations would be 'earth, wind and fire'. Committee co-chairman Lee Reynolds of the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council, however, noted that the Committee was unlikely to achieve the full involvement of Protestant communities - mainly due to the fact that most state schools were open on St Patrick's Day.

16 November 1998 The Belfast City Council representative on the St Patrick's Day Carnival Committee noted that he had informed Councillors that the groups might decide to split funding and go their separate ways. A number of proposals on the timing of a parade and guidelines were suggested but none received cross-community support. (Belfast City Council: Briefing Document)

30 November 1998 After failing to agree on the key issues of the timing and date of the parade and guidelines for participation those representing unionist area community groups withdrew from the meeting stating that they did not consider the parade to be cross-community. Nationalist area community group representatives responded that they did not consider the committee dissolved and continued with the meeting.

1 February 1999 The Council decided not to provide funding for the 1999 St Patrick's Day Carnival. The Carnival was launched independently the following day.

2000 Belfast City Council decided not to fund either the St Patrick's Day Carnival or St Patrick's Heritage events on the grounds that it did not provide a strong enough cross-community element. The Council decision faced a legal challenge from the StPDCC on the grounds that it was contrary to Article 28 of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (1998). The Court found that the StPDCC had failed to show that they had been treated less favourably than the St Patrick's Heritage Association and the claim was dismissed. (Belfast St Patrick's Day Carnival Committee versus Belfast City Council)

March 2001 A report from the St Patrick's Heritage Association (*Celebrating Patrick: A report into attitudes within the unionist community of Belfast to celebrating Saint Patrick*) criticises the lack of inclusivity at the City Hall. The report was in turn criticised by Caitriona Ruane of the St Patrick's Day Carnival Committee.

17 March 2002 An attempt to add a humorous element to the Belfast event was criticised by the *News Letter*:

Men dressed in black berets and dark glasses, a form of garb worn by the IRA at funerals and demonstrations, added a sinister aspect to a St Patrick's Day parade yesterday. The men waved to the crowds in Belfast city centre as they drove along in a white car marked "Garda" on the side. Although the stunt was good-humoured, it added a deeper shade of green too an event which has largely failed to appeal to Protestants. ('Men in black cast shadow on Green day' *News Letter* 18 March 2002)

February 2003 Belfast City Council adopts a Good Relations Strategy. In relation to festivals it states (in part):

The implementation of the code of practice would seek to ensure that the events would be non-threatening and that the organisers would have to illustrate that they included an opportunity for input from both the major communities and

other groups within the City. The selection of a neutral venue, the availability of safe access and ensuring that there was a planned welcome for all visitors could make the event inclusive.

12 December 2003 The Policy and Resources Committee adopted a recommendation from the Council's Good Relations Steering Panel that St Patrick's Day funding should support an indoor concert and provide grant aid for small scale community events (eventually totalling just over £22,000).

5 January 2004 Belfast City Council ratifies the policy adopted by the Policy and Resources Committee in December.

2004 Belfast City Council voted not to fund the St Patrick's Day Carnival.

17 March 2004 An event, organised by the St Patrick's Carnival Committee, is held outside the City Hall. *The Irish News* reported a generally good-natured atmosphere at the City Hall outdoor concert, however, trouble broke out after the conclusion of the concert in the city's main shopping area several hundred yards from where the concert had taken place and later at the Peter's Hill area of the lower Shankill. A loyalist car bomb was also found at University Street shortly after 8pm on St Patrick's Day. On stage drinking by performer Shane McGowan attracts criticism.

24 September 2004 A report on that year's celebrations was discussed at a BCC Policy and Resource Committee meeting. The debate over the flying of Tricolours and what was an appropriate celebration of 'Irishness' on St Patrick's Day appeared no closer to resolution (Belfast City Council minutes B2966-2967).

10 December 2004 The Policy and Resources Committee agreed that, if necessary, the Council take the lead in organising a major outdoor event on St Patrick's Day in 2006 to mark the City Hall's Centenary Year.

Policy and Resources Committee agreed criteria to be used in allocating Council funding for an outdoor public event to mark St Patrick's Day:

- Widely accepted location

- Inclusivity and broad participation
- Evident commitment to encouraging understanding and celebrating cultural diversity
- Avoidance of use of symbols and signage that may be regarded as offensive or triumphalist
- Event management and stewarding according to best practice standards.

2005 Relations between Belfast City Council and the Carnival organisers saw an improvement. The Carnival organisers had made renewed attempts to make the event more cross-community, including the adoption of a multi-coloured shamrock as the Carnival's official symbol. A £30,000 grant to the Carnival had also been approved in principle by the Good Relations and Policy and Resources committees. Councillor Billy Hutchinson (PUP) supported the allocation of the grant stating that the Carnival organisers had genuinely tried to reach out to Protestants and that by not funding that year's event the Council was, 'sending out all the wrong signals'. ('PUP councillor slams funding decision' *Irish News* 5 February 2005)

14 February 2005 A Council meeting voted not to fund the StPDCC event with Councillor Billy Hutchinson as the only non-nationalist to support funding. Alliance Councillor Naomi Long recognised that membership of the Carnival Committee had changed recently and there had been a more positive engagement with the Council in the previous month but 'to fund the parade directly, we need more than good intentions – we need to see substantive progress on key issues ... Hopefully, we can continue over the next 12 months to develop this co-operation and have a truly inclusive, council funded event in 2006.' ('Alliance compromise agreed for St Patrick's Day' www.allianceparty.org/news)

The Council authorised its officers to engage in discussions with the 2005 event organisers in an effort to co-ordinate and co-operate in respect of street trading, alcohol by-laws and health and safety issues. St Patrick's Carnival Committee representatives co-operated fully with Council officers in this regard.

17 March 2005 The year's event was more child-oriented and a sizable proportion of the crowd was made up of children and parents. Numbers at the event were estimated to be approximately 3,000-4,000 (*Irish News* 18 March 2005). The tenor of the event was still largely nationalist with (as in previous years) many individuals wearing Glasgow Celtic, Republic of Ireland and GAA shirts. More people appeared to wear shamrocks than had been the case in the previous year.

The only flag on display among the crowd was the Irish Tricolour. The organisers had made some efforts to make the year's celebration more cross-community and had created a multi-coloured shamrock as an emblem. Individuals handed out copies of this (on A4 paper) to members of the crowd. This symbol would later be adopted by Belfast City Council for use in the 2006 event.

24 June 2005 A report from the Good Relations Manager, adopted by the Good Relations Steering Panel (on 10 June), recommended the Council take the lead in delivering an inclusive outdoor event for St Patrick's Day 2006. Terms and conditions of entry would be the same as for any other Council organised event (Appendix I). The policy is adopted by the Policy and Resources Committee and accepted by Belfast City Council on 5 July.

5 July 2005 Belfast City Council voted to provide £70,000 towards an 'inclusive' St Patrick's Day event in 2006 with the event to be assessed independently for its potential to become an annual event. The outdoor event was to be held at the recently developed Custom House Square area as part of the Celebrate Belfast programme which was to run from late 2005 until the end of 2006.

5 September 2005 BCC held a public consultation meeting on the question of organising an outdoor St Patrick's Day event. Consensus was reached on a variety of key issues including:

- All represented participants would actively promote symbol criteria to help make the event work so long as it was truly inclusive.
- St Patrick's Day 2006 should be a participative inclusive family day out.

The idea of a carnival procession was raised. Feedback on the idea suggested that a procession

...provides opportunity for the people of Belfast to participate, join together, and feel part of their city. Work together, walk together, celebrate together.

...a carnival parade and carnival atmosphere is much more inclusive than a pop concert which doesn't appeal to everyone.

Protestant community would not take part in a parade, at this stage, maybe next year.

9 September 2005 A report from the Good Relations Manager outlined the current position on the St Patrick's Day event and includes the Council's standard terms and conditions of entry to their events.

23 September 2005 A report from the Good Relations and Events Managers outlined a proposed format and layout for a Council organised outdoor event on St Patrick's Day. This included an estimate of costs and Terms and Conditions of entry. The report noted that the consultation process found that the Council criteria on symbols and emblems were acceptable, the multi-coloured shamrock symbol was acceptable and that there was a possibility of ensuring full community participation through, for example, a carnival procession.

The Policy and Resources Committee deferred consideration of the report until further discussion with each of the political party groupings had taken place on issues such as terms and conditions of entry, security in and around the venue and a proposed carnival procession.

21 October 2005 A report from the Good Relations and Events Managers to the Policy and Resources Committee noted that following consultation with community groups that there was consensus about ensuring full community participation through, for example, a carnival procession. The Council had been offered £25,000 by the Arts Council for NI for artistic based activity around St Patrick's Day. The finance was conditional on a similar event being created as part of the 12 July celebrations.

The Policy and Resources Committee noted issues which had been discussed at the consultation meeting and noted, 'there was the possibility of ensuring full community participation through, for example, a carnival procession.'

The meeting also noted that 'an organisation such as the Beat Initiative, which has a good local cross-community network, could be approached to organise such a carnival procession.'

6 November 2005 A *Sunday Times* article by Liam Clarke, 'St Patrick's Day gets a PC re-brand', reported that t-shirts would be offered to cover up football shirts at the St Patrick's Day outdoor concert, 'There is also expected to be a ban on people painting their faces green, white and orange, or in the colours of the Union Jack.' The same report noted that the Cross of St Patrick consisted of a white cross on a blue background! The report carried a large photograph of a young girl (with pig-tails) wearing a Celtic shirt with a 'Banned' stamp over the photograph.

8 November 2005 A *Belfast Telegraph* story by Claire McNeilly entitled, 'St Patrick's Day ... but no Shamrocks.' stated that, 'alcohol, green shamrocks, national flags, partisan face painting and football tops are to be banned.'

9 November 2005 *The Belfast Telegraph* morning edition article carried an article entitled, 'A rainbow shamrock is patronising lunacy'.

9 November 2005 A meeting between Council officials and members of the St Patrick's Day Carnival Committee reflected on recent media coverage which had put heavy emphasis on the line that certain items were to be 'censored' or 'banned'. It was agreed that Terms and Conditions for the event should apply to all future Council events and would be included on all flyers and advertisements for such events.

Officials also noted that the Arts Council of Northern Ireland had informed them that funding for St Patrick's Day events and the proposed Orange Fest were not linked. It was agreed that Events Manager would draw up a proposal regarding the Beat Initiative project in order to draw down Arts Council funding for a St Patrick's Day parade.

10 November 2005 A letter from Conor Maskey of the St Patrick's Day Carnival Committee in the *Irish News* argued, 'Belfast City Council does not ban emblems or try to impose a dress code in other events they organise- such as Proms in the Park. They should not try to do so for next year's St Patrick's Day celebrations.'

13 November 2005 A *Sunday World* article, entitled 'Shamrock of a plan', attacked plans for a 'politically correct' St Patrick's Day celebration. It also criticised the use of a multi-coloured shamrock symbol.

18 November 2005 A report from the Good Relations Manager to the Policy and Resources Committee noted that the Arts Council offered up to £25,000 towards the St Patrick's Day event. 'The Events Manager will prepare the application to the Arts Council based on the incorporation into the event of a carnival element, to be organised by the east Belfast based Beat Initiative.'

On a vote of 6-5 the Policy and Resources Committee deferred funding for the St Patrick's Day, 'in view of the fact that security and other issues had not yet been resolved satisfactorily.'

28 November 2005 The Beat Initiative lodged a proposal with Belfast City Council with the objective of producing, 'a lively, colourful, celebratory, carnival style parade that engages the diverse citizens of Belfast and that promotes good relations on St Patrick's Day 2006.'

29 November 2005 A second consultation evening was held by BCC. The Events Manager noted that Arts Council funding terms and conditions had been changed and funding for St Patrick's Day was no longer attached to Twelfth of July funding.

The groups were alarmed that the process of organising the outdoor event had been 'halted' by the Policy and Resources Committee. During the discussion mention was made of a press article for which 'the accompanying photographs had been misleading'. Other agreed points included the need for an early decision to maximise preparation time and the need to come together to discuss issues of inclusiveness.

1 December 2005 A BCC Council meeting agreed that the Policy and Resources Committee should receive a deputation from the groups who had taken part in the consultation process.

9 December 2005 A Policy and Resources Committee meeting was addressed by individuals from across the community who had attended the second consultation meeting. In the Minutes that were approved by Council the following was noted.

Rev. Drennan made the point that, while it was recognised that the event was ground breaking and in some respects controversial, it would provide an opportunity for reconciliation and he urged the committee to agree that it be permitted to proceed. He stated that any problems that might arise at the event could be seen in the context of a learning exercise and addressed when future events were held. Mr Maskey contended that the Councils own guidelines for events should be applied and administered and, while it was difficult to instruct people with regard to the clothing which should be worn, the community groups would attempt to encourage as many members of the public as possible to adhere to the guidelines in their entirety.

The Committee voted 9-6 in favour of proceeding with the St Patrick's Day Event.

4 January 2006 Council approved the Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee from the 9th December and voted in favour of funding the event. Passed by one vote – unionist councillors voted against, nationalist and Alliance councillors voted in favour.

11 January 2006 A meeting of BCC officers from Events and Good Relations regarding St Patrick's Day noted that, 'approximately 400 participants from community groups around the city' would take part in the parade. Green t-shirts with white writing and a white shamrock would be produced for handing out. Prices for St Patrick's Cross flags and multi-coloured shamrocks would also be sourced.

24 January A third consultation evening was held. The Beat Initiative had been awarded the contract to organise the procession on the previous day and a steering group for the parade was being formed, with cross community participation. The group met on a regular basis to coordinate the event.

The Institute of Irish Studies QUB were appointed as independent evaluators of the outdoor event.

The Event's manager stated that football jerseys would not be confiscated but t-shirts would be offered to wear over them. There could be no guarantee that there would be no flags carried.

A community group representative noted that to get people from the Short Strand and Markets to go to the event would require a parade to the City centre.

8 February 2006 The second meeting of Parade steering group was held. Community representatives said there would be a procession from Short Stand and Markets, this had been decided the previous day.

Some t-shirts were to be distributed to community groups in advance of the procession.

25 February 2006 Serious rioting takes place in Dublin as protestors oppose a 'Love Ulster' demonstration.

27 February 2006 *Radio Ulster* headlines stated that Tricolours and alcohol were to be 'banned'. *BBC News Website* 27 February 'City plans for St Patrick's Day' reported that: 'The council has banned alcohol and emblems, including flags, at the celebrations, which will cost £100,000.' However, the report later quoted Deputy Lord Mayor, Pat Convery (SDLP), as saying he hoped the parade on 17 March would be an inclusive event. 'We are saying there should be no emblems or symbols that would be deemed as sectarian, racist, or anything that would be offensive to anyone,' he said. 'We are depending on the citizens of this city to have good faith and to help us generate a situation whereby there will be a good event and all will feel welcome.'

6. Media coverage preceding the 2006 Belfast St Patrick's Day event

6.1 Coverage of St Patrick's Day in the media pre-2005.

St Patrick's Day has been a site of symbolic struggle in the media for the duration of the funding controversy. In effect, both nationalists and unionists made claims about the ownership of the day, attempted to promote their own understanding of what the event should be about and sought to undermine competing claims. Broadly speaking, for the nationalist press, St Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland and the day should be centred on various expressions of Irishness, of which national symbols such as the Tricolour form a natural part. Positive parallels are often drawn with other St Patrick's Day events in Dublin and across the world at which the expressions of Irish nationalism are unproblematic. The Belfast situation is presented as one in which nationalists are unfairly deprived of their national day.

In contrast, the unionist press often points out that St Patrick predates Irish nationalism and had no links to the Roman Catholic church. Hence St Patrick's Day has been hijacked by republicans. St Patrick's Day is therefore in need of radical reform to remove elements of exclusive Irishness and, in particular, to regulate the usage of political symbols. Typically, articles from a unionist perspective reject the event as exclusive, draw parallels with Downpatrick as the ideal model of a neutral and Tricolour free event, or highlight other events which subvert the nationalist interpretation of St Patrick (eg Orange Order 17th March celebrations).

The end result of this coverage is a view of St Patrick's Day as a 'zero-sum' situation, typical of many symbolic contests in identity conflicts, whereby the gains of one side are viewed as the losses of the other. At the poles of the dispute, some nationalist reports depict unionist objections as a threat to their Irish identity, while unionist reports depict the desire of nationalists to display Irishness as exclusive and sectarian. Therefore, St Patrick's Day has generally been depicted as a matter of possession and control rather than of shared celebration between the two communities.

6.2 July 5th 2005 press release and media reaction

Against this background BCC released information on 5th July 2005, concerning the agreement to organise and fund the 2006 St Patrick's Day event. This was a positive statement in which the Council claimed that it would 'address the controversy which has surrounded the St Patrick's Day event in recent years and is determined to provide an inclusive event which can be enjoyed by everyone in the city, whatever their background... the event will be as inclusive as possible and all the residents of Belfast will feel comfortable attending it in 2006'. The statement made it clear that the initiative was undertaken by the Good Relations Steering Panel with a view to promoting better intercommunity relations in the city. Cllr Alex Maskey of the Policy and Resources committee was quoted in the release as endorsing the plan as a 'major step forward' and, though criticising the lack of funding in previous years, promoted the event as being 'for all the people in Belfast'.

The significance of this message is that it departs radically from the widely held understandings of the event evident in media coverage of previous years. By casting the event as a collaborative project between the Council and the organising committee and presenting it as necessarily including all communities in Northern Ireland, it transcends the previous zero-sum equation and reformulates the event as a matter of constructive cooperation rather than as a power-struggle.

The media reaction to this release was predominantly in line with the message of the statement, with all articles linking funding to Council involvement in the organisation of the event and highlighting the desire to make the event inclusive to all communities in Belfast. All articles mentioned that there had been unionist concerns over previous events and that these were to be addressed in the 2006 arrangements. Though in general the coverage was positive, some articles were more enthusiastic than others as reflected in the variety of headlines: 'St Patrick's Day Relief' (*Andersonstown News*, 9th July), 'Breakthrough in St Patrick's Day Carnival Controversy' (*Irish News*, 6th July) 'Council to Fund St Pat's Day event' (*News Letter*, 7th July) and, perhaps more ambiguously, 'Council's Green Light for Carnival' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 6th July).

Moreover, there is some evidence that the new message of inclusivity and cooperation has not entirely replaced the older adversarial model of the event. *The Andersonstown News* cast the funding as a ‘victory’ for the carnival committee rather than as a collaborative success (*Andersonstown News*, 9th July). The editorial pointed out that funding for the event was long overdue and nationalists could now rightfully celebrate their national day. From this perspective the issue of inclusiveness is secondary and a matter of modifying the celebration of Irishness to include unionists ‘we will be reasonable and magnanimous when it comes to those aspects of the St Patrick’s Day celebrations that many unionists genuinely have trouble with’. In other words, St Patrick’s Day is the property of the nationalist community who will attempt to make unionists feel welcome, rather than both communities having an equal stake in the event.

In contrast, the *Belfast Telegraph* and *News Letter* both contained comments by a unionist councillor emphasising that previous years events were not inclusive or welcoming because of displays of Irish symbolism: ‘In the past these events have not been welcoming or inclusive. We want any future event to be free from the plethora of Irish Tricolours to reflect the culture and diversity of the city’. In other words, St Patrick’s Day is presented as the property of the Council and its role is to suppress expressions of Irish nationalism.

While such sentiments constituted a minority of the coverage, it is worth pointing out that these older ideas of power struggle and symbolic conflict remained at the fringes of the coverage at this stage.

6.3 November 2005 coverage

The St Patrick’s Day controversy reignited in November as information from the council discussions of the preparations for the event reached the press. In this period the tone of the media coverage changed and the BCC message of inclusiveness and cooperation was somewhat eclipsed by the issue of whether symbols would be banned at this year’s event.

Ridiculing the ban on symbols and emblems

The focus on the regulation of symbols effectively returned the discussion of St Patrick's Day to issues of possession and control. An article in the *Sunday Times* (6th November) was perhaps the most sensational and least constructive in this regard. The report contained several factual inaccuracies, such as including shamrocks and face-painting among the symbols to be regulated, as well as confusing the flag of St Patrick with the St Andrew's cross (presumably as both are 'saltires'). These elements were presented in sensationalistic form with young girls with face-paints and Celtic tops pictured with 'banned' stamped across the photos.

In addition to sensationalising the 'ban', the article also undermined the good relations aspects of the BCC project. The regulation of symbols was presented negatively as a 'PC-rebrand' rather than positively as part of a wider attempt to create a new cross-community event. This was compounded by a focus on the Arts Council funding of both St Patrick's Day and the Twelfth of July Orangefest as constituting a direct equivalence between the events. Given the nature of the Twelfth of July as an overwhelmingly single-identity celebration which has never been claimed to be cross-community, this parallel did little to promote the understanding of St Patrick's Day as inclusive. In effect, the article characterised the BCC proposals as a rather contrived attempt to domesticate a single identity event rather than create a new space for a shared celebration.

The extent to which this article had an impact on future press coverage is difficult to assess, though some of the errors concerning face-painting, the colours of the flag of St Patrick and the criticism of the multicoloured shamrock were directly reproduced in subsequent articles in other newspapers. Articles such as 'A rainbow shamrock is patronising lunacy' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 9th November), 'Shamrock of a plan' (*Sunday World*, 13th November), 'St Patrick's Day but no shamrocks' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 8th November) all focused largely on the impractical and unreasonable aspects of banning green shamrocks and wiping face-paints from children's faces.

Dissent and conflicting messages

Another complicating factor in the coverage at this stage was that of disagreement between members of the Policy and Resources committee. On the 8th and 9th November the *Belfast Telegraph* and *Irish News* published several articles in which the disagreement between councillors was highlighted. From their reported comments, the councillors disagreed both on the essence and the practicalities of the event. In terms of the essence of the event, one unionist councillor was quoted as saying ‘Many people believe that St Patrick’s Day has been subverted by Republicans. There are those who aren’t about celebrating St Patrick, but are about celebrating the Irish Republic... I want to celebrate St Patrick’s Day, but I am not Irish’ (*Belfast Telegraph*, 8th November). In contrast, a nationalist councillor was reported as saying that people would want to wear their nationalist colours (*Belfast Telegraph*, 8th November) and that ‘the day is all about Irish nationalism’ (*Irish News*, 9th November; though this was corrected in the next day’s edition, where the councillor said that his actual words were ‘an Irish national day’). In this way these councillors reproduced the longstanding debate over whether St Patrick’s Day is essentially an exclusive expression of Irishness or not.

Likewise their preferred plans for the day reflected their stance on the matter of Irishness (*Belfast Telegraph*, 8th November). For the unionist councillor, Irish symbols were the key barrier to an inclusive event: ‘Next year has to be an inclusive event, because in the past it has been so controversial ... Our main concerns are flags and football jerseys’. For the nationalist councillor, the association of St Patrick’s Day with Irishness meant that the Tricolour had a place at the event and attempts to regulate symbols were ‘unnecessarily restrictive’: ‘Yes, promote a corporate logo, but you can’t enforce a ban... How could you have a St Patrick’s Day if you ban all Irish colours?’. Likewise, on the 10th November, a member of the Carnival Committee in a letter to the *Irish News* stated that the organising committee resisted attempts by councillors or anyone else to ‘tell people what they can and can’t wear’ and pointed out that the Council funded The Proms, yet did not restrict the use of Union flags.

Given the conflicting and incompatible nature of comments from councillors and committee members it is unsurprising that more than one version of the BCC's position on the issue of symbols began to circulate. In effect, the majority of reports took the 'ban on symbols' as official BCC policy, while a minority reported that this was not the case. As we shall see below, the effect of these contradictory messages was to set up two distinct expectations of what would happen on the day of the event.

6.4 January 2006 coverage

On 4th January the Council voted by the narrowest of margins to go ahead with the funding of St Patrick's Day. This was variously reported as a positive decision to back the event (*Belfast Telegraph*, 5th January); a failed attempt to stop funding (*Irish News*, 5th January); the defeat of the unionist side of the chamber (*News Letter*, 5th January). In all articles the debate was represented as a sectarian dispute with unionist concerns about security and inclusivity pitted against arguments from Alliance, SDLP and Sinn Féin that the event would be inclusive and safe.

Again reports differed in their understanding of the rationale for the regulation of symbols and exactly what might be regulated. One article in the *Belfast Telegraph* reported that 'Alcohol, green shamrocks, partisan face-painting and football tops will be banned' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 5th January). The *Irish News* reported one unionist councillor's security concerns about 'who would police the crowd to ensure no political flags or football shirts would be present'. The *News Letter* reported another unionist councillor pointing out that the policy and resources committee had yet to tell people to 'leave their Tricolours at home... Up to now Sinn Féin has fudged the issue and although we have produced guidelines for the day in relation to Tricolours and other flags, that is all they are, guidelines. We have serious reservations about whether it would be possible to enforced these guidelines and remain unconvinced' (4th January). However some effort was made to move the debate away from symbols 'This is not about flags, this is about Belfast City council's centenary year and organising something as a celebration of our patron saint' (SDLP councillor, quoted in *Belfast Telegraph*, 5th January)

6.5 Coverage in the lead up to St Patrick's Day

The symbols issue dominated the substantive coverage of the event. The issue of inclusiveness also occurred frequently, although this tended to be tied to the issue of symbolism rather than receiving coverage in its own right. The multicultural dimension of the event and the depiction of the day as a family day out both received less attention. In addition, as the day of the event approached, the coverage became more specific to the details of what would actually happen at the expense of discussing the nature of the day or what the event should celebrate. Hence discussions of St Patrick and comparisons with other events were much less prevalent than in the November coverage.

The symbols debate in the lead up to St Patrick's Day

The BCC press release on the 27th February was largely factual in content, describing the content and timings of the event on the day. The issue of inclusiveness was not addressed directly, but alluded to in the description of the concert line-up at Custom House Square. In terms of the regulations of the event, the capacity of CHS was highlighted and the release stated that no alcohol would be sold or permitted on the site. No mention was made of political symbols or the rules and regulations governing BCC/Laganside sponsored events.

The Deputy Lord Mayor was quoted in several papers as appealing to the goodwill of those attending 'We are saying that there should be no symbols that would be deemed as sectarian... We are depending on the citizens of the city to have good faith and to help us generate a situation whereby there will be a good event and all will feel welcome' (eg *Irish News*, 28th February). However, the reports do not contain a definitive statement from BCC on whether or not there would be any attempt by the carnival organisers to actively regulate symbols.

The photo shoot launching the St Patrick's Day event was covered in many of the newspapers, but in very different ways. The *News Letter* (28th February) simply had a photograph with a caption mentioning that the BCC would be organising a carnival procession as part of Celebrate Belfast 2006. The *Irish*

News (28th February) and *Belfast Telegraph* (28th Feb) featured similar photographs but also included reports of the details of the event which highlighted the issue of symbols.

The *Andersonstown News* (4th March) mentioned the details of the event and the regulation of alcohol, but neglected to mention anything at all in relation to flags and emblems. However, in its 'texts' page, four separate items all strongly criticised the 'ban' on symbols in the event (6th March). All these texts took the regulation of symbols to threaten their national identity but advocated different actions: one promised to deliberately attend wearing football top and with Tricolour, while another advocated a boycott of the parade. Two similar texts appeared in issues leading up to the event (11th March; reprinted 13th March).

In the days preceding the event, the newspaper coverage became more concerned with the details of the event itself, often providing brief factual accounts of the timing and location of the Belfast event alongside coverage of other events around Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This was reflected in a shift in emphasis in the symbols debate from whether a 'ban' was a desirable to whether it would in fact be enforced. Several conflicting lines of argument were apparent according to whether the 'ban' was accepted as fact or not and whether it was practical to enforce it.

- The first continues the previous emphasis on the 'ban' on symbols so, for example, the *Belfast Telegraph* (16th March) state: 'To make this year's event as inclusive and family friendly as possible, Belfast City Council has banned all alcohol and emblems including flags'. The *Sunday Life* presented this in a more extreme fashion with an article provocatively entitled: 'Behave like saints or we pull funding' (*Sunday Life*, 12th March). The article largely cast the issue as one of suppressing republican symbols, reporting unionist councillors' threats to withdrawing support if this fails.
- At this stage though, the efficacy of the ban began be called into question. In the same *Sunday Life* article, one unionist councillor was reported as saying

‘There are worries and we can only hope the stewards and police are able to do their jobs’. Likewise, an article in the *News Letter* (printed on 18th March, but acknowledged by the author to have been written before the event) argued that the retreat of the carnival committee from the regulation of symbols put BCC in a difficult situation of having to enforce a ban at the event itself and asked whether this was possible.

- In contrast, the *North Belfast News* published an article (18th March edition, published 16th March) in which it stated ‘Two weeks ago the North Belfast News asked Belfast city Council (BCC) to confirm if those carrying Ireland’s national flag or wearing its colours will be barred. The answer was a definite no.’ A member of the Carnival Committee was quoted as saying ‘We would ask however that people are also mindful of the fact that this is an event open to all sections of our community and that everyone should be given the opportunity to enjoy the event in a family orientated atmosphere’ thereby echoing the Deputy Lord Mayor’s approach by appealing to the social responsibility of those attending.

In line with the November press coverage, the symbols issue overshadowed the lead up to the event itself. The BCC press release and accompanying statement was in line with the spirit of the original plan for the event, but unfortunately did not resolve the issue. Competing arguments as to what should happen gave way to conflicting accounts of what would actually occur.

Conclusions

- Overall, the media coverage preceding the 2006 St Patrick’s Day event reproduced the longstanding arguments around what St Patrick’s Day should celebrate and what the valid model for the Belfast event should be.
- The initial press release stressed the necessity of an inclusive event and the good relations dimension of the project. This was accurately reported in the newspaper coverage, though some reports persisted in characterising the issue as a power struggle.

- The tone of the coverage was set in November 2005 when details of council discussions were taken up by most newspapers as controversial. One article in the *Sunday Times* (6th November) was particularly critical and contained several factual errors (including the suggestion that there was a ban on face-painting) which were then reproduced in other newspapers
- The controversy was fuelled by disagreement between councillors and members of the St Patrick's Day carnival committee as to whether a 'ban' on symbols should be enforced.
- The debate remained unresolved and fuelled speculation as to what would actually happen. Though most reports expected some form of regulation, one stated that BCC had confirmed that no ban on symbols would be enforced (*North Belfast News*, 18th March edition).
- The end result was that the event was predominantly characterised as a power struggle rather than a cooperative inclusive event and a range of different expectations of what would actually happen on the day coexisted.

7. Postal survey of perceptions and expectations of the St Patrick's Day event 2006

7.1 Given that only a small proportion of Belfast residents will actually attend St Patrick's Day (or any single event) in the city centre, it is important to attempt to assess the views of those who do not attend. In order to do this we conducted a small-scale postal survey.

Survey tool (Appendix II):

- Questions were developed from the Council discussions of relevant issues, the analysis of press coverage of the issue as well as previous academic research on popular perceptions of St Patrick's Day.
- The survey was designed as short and self-explanatory so as to be answerable within a short space of time in an uncontrolled environment.
- Questions addressed:
 - Interpretations of St Patrick's Day
 - Perceptions of the day in previous years
 - Expectations of this year's events
 - Self report of how comfortable the respondent would feel at the event (in line with the BCC specification that the event should ensure that all residents of Belfast would feel 'comfortable')
 - Perceptions of how various political groups may feel at the event

Method of distribution:

Two electoral areas, Ballymacarrett and Malone, were selected on the basis of containing an approximately even balance of nationalist and unionist residents in each and spanning the socioeconomic range of the city. From the electoral registers 200 names and addresses were randomly selected for each district. The questionnaire was sent out with a cover-letter explaining the rationale for the study and offering the incentive of a prize draw for those who would fill out and return questionnaires.

We received 83 responses indicating a response rate of 21% which is characteristic of postal questionnaire returns. Of these, 4 were posted after St Patrick's Day and were thus discarded and a further 3 contained substantial omissions and were discounted. Overall, the distribution resulted in 76 usable questionnaires. Given the sensitive content of the questionnaire and the involved nature of the request (to complete two questionnaires over a four week period), this is a relatively satisfactory completion rate.

Demographic profile of respondents

- Location: 30 respondents were from the Ballymacarrett district and 46 from the Malone area.
- Gender: 41 respondents were male and 35 were female.
- Age: Many respondents did not give their age, but for the 34 who did, ages ranged from 17 to 80 with an average age of 45.74.
- Religion: In response to a closed ended question asking respondents to provide their religious affiliation, 29 indicated Catholic, 38 indicated Protestant and 2 indicated that they belonged to another religion.
- Nationality: In response to an open-ended question: "What nationality do you consider yourself to be?", 29 answered Irish, 38 answered British, 8 gave another answer.

Overall there did not appear to be substantial age, gender, religious or nationality biases in the sample and we have sufficient numbers in each category to make meaningful comparisons between different groups. In other words, while the views of the sample cannot be taken to be representative of the broader groups from which they are taken (i.e. the entire population of Belfast), the differences between the average scores for each group should give some indication of wider group differences (for our purposes, between Catholics and Protestants).

7.2 Interpretations of St Patrick's Day

Respondents were asked 'What do you think St Patrick's Day should celebrate?' and asked to agree or disagree with a variety of items taken from the media coverage preceding the event. Answers were given on a five point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', with a midpoint of 'neither agree nor disagree'. The table below shows the numbers of respondents answering 'agree or strongly agree' as well as those answering 'disagree or strongly disagree'. The remainder who answered 'neither agree nor disagree' or left the question blank are omitted. For ease of comparison, the proportions of respondents in these two answer categories are expressed as percentages with the actual number of respondents in brackets below:

| Item | % agreeing or strongly agreeing | % disagreeing or strongly disagreeing | Total no. answering |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| St Patrick as the patron saint of Ireland? | 83.6% (56) | 7.5% (5) | 100% (67) |
| St Patrick bringing Christianity to Ireland? | 75.0% (48) | 9.4% (6) | 100% (64) |
| Irishness | 46.6% (27) | 32.8% (19) | 100% (58) |
| All religions and traditions on the island of Ireland | 65.6% (42) | 20.3% (13) | 100% (64) |

- We can see that overall respondents tended to agree or strongly agree with the items suggesting that St Patrick's Day should celebrate the patron saint of Ireland, bringing Christianity to Ireland and all religions and traditions on the island of Ireland. In other words, there would appear to be a broad consensus that St Patrick's Day should celebrate these things.
- Responses to the suggestion that St Patrick's Day celebrate Irishness were more mixed, with a substantial proportion disagreeing.

- If we look at the average scores of Catholics and Protestants (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree) we can see that the disagreement over St Patrick's Day celebrating Irishness is largely a matter of religious difference:

| Item | Average score for Protestants | Average score for Catholics | Average score for total sample |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| St Patrick as the patron saint of Ireland? | 4.03 | 4.64 | 4.29 |
| St Patrick bringing Christianity to Ireland? | 4.02 | 4.27 | 4.12 |
| Irishness | 2.46 | 3.77 | 3.04 |
| All religions and traditions on the island of Ireland | 4.00 | 3.54 | 3.80 |

- Though Catholics tend to agree slightly more strongly than Protestants that St Patrick's Day should celebrate St Patrick as the patron saint of Ireland and bringing Christianity to Ireland, the differences are small and the average scores for each group are positive. We can say that there is a good degree of cross community consensus that St Patrick should be celebrated in this fashion.
- Likewise, the idea that St Patrick's Day should celebrate all religions and traditions on the island of Ireland is slightly more popular with Protestants than Catholics, though scores for both groups indicate an average agreement.
- However, the difference in agreement that St Patrick's Day should celebrate Irishness is much more substantial and reflects polarised attitudes to this issue. The score for Protestants is below the midpoint of 3, indicating a general disagreement, while the score for Catholics is above the midpoint, indicating an average agreement.

Summary:

There would appear to be agreement across the postal sample that St Patrick's Day should celebrate St Patrick as the patron saint of Ireland, bringing Christianity to Ireland and celebrating all traditions and religions on the island of Ireland. This would appear to constitute a degree of cross community consensus on several aspects of St Patrick's Day. However, on average Catholics see it as celebrating Irishness while Protestants do not.

7.3 Perceptions of previous years' events.

In order to assess popular opinion of previous years St Patrick's Day events in Belfast, people were asked: 'Do you think that St Patrick's Day in previous years...?' and presented with a number of items adapted from news coverage of previous years events to capture the essence of the BCC's ideal St Patrick's Day event. The elements of being welcoming, inclusiveness, being a family day out and an explicit assessment of the symbols issue were thought to capture the various dimensions of the BCC plan. As in section one, respondents were asked to indicate agreement or disagreement on a 5 point scale:

| Item | % agreeing or strongly agreeing | % disagreeing or strongly disagreeing | Total |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Has been welcoming to everyone? | 15.9% (11) | 71.0% (49) | 100% (69) |
| Has had all communities in Belfast taking part? | 4.3% (3) | 84.1% (58) | 100% (69) |
| Has had too many symbols that could be seen as political? | 69.9% (51) | 13.7% (10) | 100% (73) |
| Has been a family day out? | 29.0% (20) | 44.9% (31) | 100% (69) |

- For the majority of respondents, previous year's events were not welcoming to everyone and did not have all communities in Belfast taking part.

- The sample was divided as to whether previous events had been a family day out
- The majority agreed that there had been too many political symbols in previous years
- Taking average scores of Catholics and Protestants:

| Item | Average score for Protestants | Average score for Catholics | Average score for total sample |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Has been welcoming to everyone? | 1.71 | 2.78 | 2.18 |
| Has had all communities in Belfast taking part? | 1.68 | 2.11 | 1.86 |
| Has had too many symbols that could be seen as political? | 4.24 | 3.41 | 3.89 |
| Has been a family day out? | 2.29 | 3.15 | 2.67 |

- While both Catholics and Protestants indicated that previous years had not been welcoming to everyone, this sentiment was much stronger among Protestants
- On average, both Catholics and Protestants disagreed that previous years had all communities taking part. Though Protestants disagreed slightly more strongly than Catholics, this was not a substantial or significant difference.
- Both Catholics and Protestants on average agreed that there had been too many symbols that could be seen as political. However, Protestants agreed with this substantially more than Catholics.
- On average, Catholics and Protestants differed in their assessment of previous events being family days out. Catholics marginally tended to agree, Protestants tended to disagree.

Summary.

There are substantial differences between Catholics and Protestants as to their perceptions of previous year's events especially in relation to the levels of political symbols at the event. However, it must be stressed that these differences are a matter of degree and that on average both Catholics and Protestants reported that there were too many symbols at previous events and that the event had not been welcoming or inclusive of all communities.

7.4 Expectations of this year's event.

As respondents completed the survey questionnaire before the 17th March, we could inquire what they expected from this year's event. Respondents were asked 'Do you think that this year's event...?':

| Item | % agreeing or strongly agreeing | % disagreeing or strongly disagreeing | Total |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Will be welcoming to everyone? | 34.7% (25) | 38.9% (28) | 100% (72) |
| Will have all communities in Belfast taking part? | 26.8% (19) | 47.9% (34) | 100% (71) |
| Will have too many symbols that could be seen as political? | 39.4% (28) | 23.9% (17) | 100% (71) |
| Will be a family day out? | 37.7% (26) | 31.9% (22) | 100% (69) |

- Responses to these items were much more divided than in the previous sections. Broadly speaking equal proportions of the sample agreed, disagreed and indicated neither agree nor disagree.
- Only slightly more people disagreed than agreed that this years event would be welcoming and a greater proportion disagreed that it would have all communities taking part

- Slightly more people agreed than disagreed that it would be a family day out and a greater proportion thought that it would have too many political symbols.
- Taking the average scores of Catholics and Protestants we can see that for both groups, scores even out around the midpoint for most items. This indicates a variety of opinions within each group

| Item | Average score for Protestants | Average score for Catholics | Average score for all sample |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Will be welcoming to everyone? | 2.53 | 3.33 | 2.87 |
| Will have all communities in Belfast taking part? | 2.50 | 3.00 | 2.73 |
| Will have too many symbols that could be seen as political? | 3.50 | 2.85 | 3.23 |
| Will be a family day out? | 2.65 | 3.58 | 3.05 |

- Catholics on average agreed slightly that the event would be welcoming, and a family day out, while Protestants, on average, disagreed
- While Protestants were slightly more pessimistic about the likelihood of all communities in Belfast taking part and agreed slightly more that there would be political symbols at the event, these differences were not statistically significant.

Summary:

Expectations of this year's event were very mixed across the sample, with large proportions of both Catholics and Protestants giving positive and negative forecasts. On balance, Protestants had more negative expectations than did Catholics in terms of the day being welcoming and a family day out.

7.5 Anticipated personal feelings if attending this year's event.

The Council explicitly wished for an event at which 'all of the residents of Belfast will feel comfortable' (BCC Press release, 5th July, 2005). Respondents were asked: 'If YOU were to go to this year's event, how do you think you would feel?' Answers recorded on a five point scale from 'very uncomfortable' to 'very comfortable', with a midpoint of 'neither comfortable nor uncomfortable'.

| | Very Uncomfortable | Quite Uncomfortable | Neither Comfortable nor Uncomfortable | Quite Comfortable | Very comfortable | TOTAL |
|-------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------|
| Total | 14 | 13 | 16 | 17 | 14 | 74 |

- The question elicited a wide variety of responses. Roughly equal numbers of the entire sample expressed some degree of expected comfort 41.9% or discomfort 36.5% at the event.
- Examining the average scores of Catholics and Protestants on this item, we can see that much of this variation is related to religious differences.

| | Very Uncomfortable | Quite Uncomfortable | Neither Comfortable nor Uncomfortable | Quite Comfortable | Very comfortable | Average score on 5pt scale |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| Protestant | 14 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 1 | 2.35 (37) |
| Catholic | 0 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 12 | 3.86 (29) |

- Of Catholic respondents, the majority (62%) expected to feel comfortable or very comfortable and the average score falls well above the midpoint reflecting this.
- Of Protestant respondents, the majority (54%) expected to feel uncomfortable or very uncomfortable and hence the average score falls below the midpoint.
- This difference is substantial and statistically significant.

Summary

Despite mixed anticipations of this year's event and varying expectations of improvements, ratings of expected personal comfort are very polarised between Catholics and Protestants.

7.6 Perceptions of group comfort at the event

We were also interested in whether members of one group can accurately empathise with the other group's feelings towards the event. We asked respondents to rate the level of comfort experienced by members of different groups at the event. In order to examine the relationship between level of comfort and perceived political preference, we asked them to rate how comfortable they thought 'nationalists' and 'unionists' would feel at the event.

| | Very or quite comfortable | Very or quite uncomfortable | Total |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| How would nationalists feel? | 87.7% 64 | 6.8% 5 | 100% 73 |
| How would unionists feel? | 21.9% 16 | 60.3% 44 | 100% 73 |

- The vast majority of the sample thought that nationalists would feel comfortable or very comfortable at the event.
- A sizable majority of the sample agreed that unionists would feel uncomfortable or very uncomfortable.
- There were no differences between Catholic and Protestant expectations of how comfortable nationalists would feel at the event but considerable differences between Catholics and Protestants expectations of how comfortable unionists would feel:

| Item | Average score for Protestants | Average score for Catholics | Average score for total sample |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| How would nationalists feel? | 4.58 | 4.28 | 4.44 |
| How would unionists feel? | 1.89 | 2.79 | 2.28 |

- On average Protestants rated unionists as much more likely to feel uncomfortable than did Catholics.

Summary

Though respondents across the sample concur that nationalists are likely to feel comfortable at the event, there appears to be a degree of underestimation of how uncomfortable unionists would feel among the Catholic sample.

7.7 Conclusions:

- There appears to be a degree of cross community consensus on several aspects of St Patrick's Day except that it should celebrate Irishness. In other words, there is evidence to suggest that there is some latitude to develop a celebration of St Patrick's Day that has support from both communities.
- Previous year's events are generally perceived by both Catholics and Protestants not to have fitted the desired model of a welcoming and inclusive family day out. Both groups agreed that there had been too many political symbols, though Protestants responded more emphatically.
- Expectations of this years event were very mixed within both communities with roughly even proportions expecting the day to fit to the BCC desired model and expecting it to fail. This parallels findings in the previous chapter that media messages as to what to expect from the event were contested and contradictory.
- In terms of respondents personal expectations of the event, nationalists reported expecting to feel more comfortable than unionists, though a

proportion of nationalists expected discomfort and some unionists expected to feel comfortable.

- There is some evidence to suggest that Catholics do not appreciate the level of discomfort anticipated by unionists at the event.

8. St Patrick's Day March 17, 2006: Chronology of Events

- 8.1 This description of the St Patrick's Day event in Belfast in 2006 is drawn from observations made by 10 observers and from video and photographic footage. As such we believe it to be reasonably accurate, however, observations of mass participation events are notoriously difficult to undertake. Numbers were estimated at different points using hand-held counters.
- 8.2 In 2006 St Patrick's Day fell on a Friday. Given that St Patrick's Day is not a public holiday, many children attending state schools were not on holiday.
- 8.3 The Beat Initiative was engaged by Belfast City Council, with a grant of 25,000 to organise the Carnival. Although the Beat Initiative had worked with some groups from Protestant areas, none of these groups took part on the day. There were, however, members of the Protestant community within the Beat Initiative Carnival displays.
- 8.4 Belfast City Council had 5,000 St Patrick's Carnival t-shirts printed (1,780 were distributed to community groups beforehand) and 8,000 flags showing either the cross of St Patrick or a multicoloured Shamrock (2,000 were distributed to community groups beforehand). These were distributed to community groups in advance and also at Custom House Square.

The Carnival

11.40 Short Strand: Approximately 330 people (+2 vehicles) left the Short Strand area. There appeared to be four different groups in costume. The Carnival was led by a 'Short Strand St Patrick's Day' banner and there were clearly designated stewards at the front and the rear of the event. This section of the Carnival was predominantly made up of women and children. The t-shirts provided by Belfast City Council were widely used but no one carried either the flag of St Patrick or the multicoloured Shamrock flag. Two middle-aged men walking with the event carried large Tricolours and there were six children

carrying smaller Tricolours. (The parade took the following route: Mountpottinger Link, Short Strand, East Bridge Street, Victoria Street, May Street, Donegall Square South, Donegall Square West.)

12.00 Belfast City Hall: Security company Eventsec undertake briefing of stewards. The briefing was in two parts – health & safety and crowd regulation. The first detailed the logistics of the operation, the layout of Custom House Square (CHS) and the position of the entrance and exit and the 5,000 limit on attendance. Entrants would be subject to bag-checks and a pat-down at the discretion of stewards. In terms of crowd regulation, stewards were informed that alcohol was banned from the event and blue bags or overt intoxication meant no access. There would also be a team enforcing the no-drinking laws in the city centre.

Flags and football shirts were not to be taken into CHS, council flags and t-shirts would be issued. Flag poles would be removed. It was stressed that this was a politically sensitive event so that people should be ‘persuaded and encouraged’ to replace political symbols. The emphasis was on positive communication and advice should not escalate into ‘huge debates’. If anyone protested, they should be advised again and then, if they persisted, referred to a supervisor. It was also noted that two teams of roving stewards would be regulating flags and symbols within the event.

12.15 An estimated 1,000 crowd gathered on Royal Avenue, this included some tourists. Two ‘street traders’ were selling Tricolours (at a cost of between 20p and 50p) outside the City Hall. There were also some multi-coloured shamrock and St Patrick’s Cross flags visible in the crowd, though not many. Those carrying flags tended to be children and infants in prams. No large Tricolours were visible in the crowd. There were a small number of police officers in high-visibility uniforms. The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed.

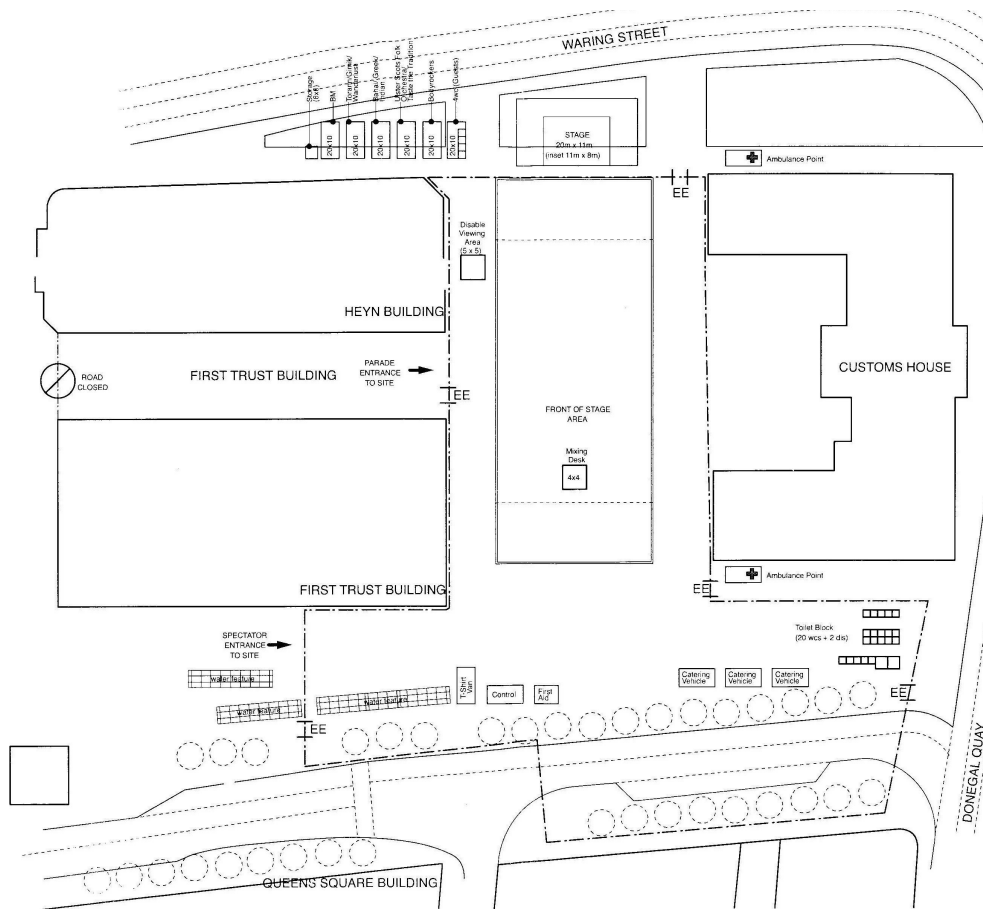
12.20 The Short Strand group arrived at the City Hall, moving around the rear of the building down Donegall Square West as arranged.

12.35 The Short Strand group left the City Hall and moved along the Carnival route (Donegall Avenue, Castle Place, High Street, Victoria Street to Custom House Square). There was a warm reception along the route.

12.50 The Carnival Parade comprising the Beat Initiative and community groups from other parts of Belfast (approx 300 people) left the City Hall. The Carnival was colourful and received a good reception from spectators. Diverse groups were involved including a Travellers group, the Filipino Sports Association, the Lesbian Advocacy Service Initiative, and Irish language groups. However, community involvement from parts of the city, other than Short Strand, appeared lower than in previous years. There were no Tricolours in the section of the parade organised by the Beat Initiative, a number were held by spectators and a few smaller flags held by people joining the rear of the event. There was a reasonable range of green, white and orange hats and whistles amongst spectators. There were very few Council supplied flags at this point in the Carnival.

13.20 The Carnival arrived at Custom House Square.

Custom House Square Event



8.5 Custom House Square is a site newly developed by the Laganside Corporation. The stage was placed at the northern end, toilets and two food kiosks were at the southern end near Donegal Quay and the main entrance was through Queen's Square. On St Patrick's Day 2006 there was no decoration around the area. There was no other entertainment in the area other than the stage show.

8.6 Custom House Square opened at 13.15. Stewards managed the entry of people into the square, forming a line at the end of barriers. On the other side of the stewards, tables were set up to hand out St Patrick's Day t-shirts, the Cross of St Patrick and Shamrock flags. There were no notices at the entrance concerning flags or football shirts.

- 8.7 Four street traders were observed in the area of the entrance to CHS; one was selling Tricolours, one green and white hooters, one sold hats and the fourth was campaigning on behalf of the Irish Anti-War Movement and sold Black Shamrock badges. The PSNI dealt with at least one of these traders.
- 8.8 Approximately 4,200 people entered the area by 14.00. For a short period of time there was a large number of people attempting to enter the area and this seemed to overwhelm the number of stewards. Some people appeared to go in to pick up a BCC t-shirt and leave CHS almost immediately. The weather was bitterly cold and many people with young children left during the event. We estimate that by 14.00 approximately 3,000 people were still in CHS, however, numbers fell quickly and by the end of the afternoon there were less than 1,000.
- 8.9 We had two observers attempting to count the number of people who entered the area carrying Irish Tricolours through the line of stewards. We counted 98 Tricolours in all plus three other flags of a broadly nationalist type (1 x Celtic, 1 x Provinces of Ireland and 1 x St Gall's GAA flag). Most of the Tricolours brought into the area were of the small plastic variety (12" x 8") that were being sold in the City centre. Most of the flags were carried in by teenagers. We believe 12 had larger flags (4 x 6 feet) draped over their shoulders.
- 8.10 18 Celtic shirts were observed, although given the cold day most people were wearing coats. Another 8 people were wearing GAA shirts and two people wore Irish Rugby jerseys (one person wore no shirt whatsoever!).
- 8.11 As far as we could see no attempt was made by stewards to encourage people to put away Tricolours or cover up clothing. One person was asked to remove a flagpole and complied. Another carrying a flag on a pole easily gained admittance to the event. In periods when there was a long queue to get in, particularly around 13.00, the stewards could not realistically have asked people to put away contentious items. A number of stewards were seconded to distributing flags and t shirts, leaving only 3 to 5 to supervise entry. The bulk of people entering the event, entered in this busy period. As numbers thinned,

stewards instigated bag searches on many individuals, but again no observable attempt was made to encourage people to cover up/put away flags and football shirts. This said, one of our observers described the situation at the entrance as ‘at all times relaxed and under control’. Stewards working on the day were relaxed and polite with all those involved.

Stewards did stop people from entering CHS who were carrying alcohol.

8.12.1 There was a broad range of acts on the stage, between 13.30 until after the advertised finishing time at 17.00. These included Irish dancers, Indian dancers and an Ulster Scots band which included Lambeg Drums.

Line up:

- Torann
- Indian Dancers
- Chinese Martial Arts demonstration
- Ulster Scots Folk Orchestra
- Wanderlust
- Taste the Tradition
- Conway Sisters
- Gimik
- Body Rockers

The compare for the events was John Daly.

8.13 The audience contained both young and old but teenagers made up a large section of the audience. All of the acts, including the Ulster-Scots band, were received with enthusiasm and appreciation. Stewards continued to watch for behaviour that suggested people were drunk and we saw a couple of youths removed. The stewarding inside the event seemed to be very effective. The overall atmosphere, at what was a predominantly youth-orientated event, was welcoming.

8.14 There were Tricolours on view throughout the event. Our observers reported that the maximum number being waved at any one time was approximately 20 though often there were less than 10. Numerically, there were many more of the flags handed out by the Council (Cross of St Patrick and multi-coloured shamrock), however, these were less visible because of their smaller size (7” x

5”). The Tricolours were nearly all carried by teenagers. There was a range of green, white and orange hats, inflatable hammers and hands, whistles and other items. There was also a wide range of items displaying the green shamrock. Tricolours were certainly visible throughout the event but a later description in the media of ‘a sea of Tricolours’ is an exaggeration.

8.15 The event appeared to finish peacefully and our observers witnessed no behaviour that was in anyway problematic.

City Centre

8.16 A number of our observers visited the area of High Street and Royal Avenue during the afternoon. The atmosphere was relaxed. There were groups of teenagers, some wearing Tricolours, wandering around and a number of street sellers remained active.

Evaluations by others

8.17 Millward Brown Ulster provides a monitoring service on tourism for Belfast City Council. Their report to the Council on the 2006 St Patrick’s Day offered a range of information including:

- 38% of those attending the Carnival were aged between 16 and 34, 48% between 35 and 54.
- 49% came as family, 23 % as a party of friends, 10% as couples and 19% as individuals.
- 7% were from outside Northern Ireland, 65% were residents of Belfast.
- Overall the event was viewed slightly less positively than in previous years nevertheless 69% viewed the event positively.
- The survey revealed that people felt there should be more activities for children.
- The total economic benefit of the event was estimated at £119,000.

8.18 Belfast City Centre Management group also conducted a survey of the views of retailers. The following findings appear particularly relevant:

- 20% of businesses reported an increase in customers whilst 63% reported a decrease.
- 19% reported an increase in sales while 47% of businesses reported a decrease.
- 53% of respondents felt that the event was as inclusive as possible while 32% thought it was not.
- 67% thought the event was well marshalled and organised, however, 11% thought it was not.
- 52 out of 74 businesses were in favour of the use of CHS for the event.

In comparison with previous years, it is pointed out that some reduction in customers may have been caused by moving the venue to CHS. However, the reduction in sales was less than in 2005.

The report suggests that there was some anti-social behaviour witnessed by the businesses that responded but it is not clear if this is any different from any normal day of the week. There was also a reduction in anti-social behaviour compared with St Patrick's Day 2005 which may also have been associated with the change of venue.

8.19 An official at the **Welcome Centre** in Belfast offered the following assessment of the 2006 St Patrick's Day Carnival.

St Patrick's Day is an important date for Belfast tourism and the Council's initiative of organising events on this day has proved to be a major asset in this regard. The potential of targeting St Patrick's Day as a focal point for celebrations in the city and promotional activity in the city is significant and improving all the time. Indeed we experienced an increase in the www.gotobelfast web site. It is important therefore that Belfast City Council build on the good work thus far to ensure that St Patrick's Day becomes a

major date in the events calendar in Belfast as there is no doubt this date is important for tourism to the city.

8.20 The PSNI suggested that ‘the event passed off very peacefully. A small number of arrests for public order offences were made in the city centre, however, none of these incidents were attributable to the Council’s St Patrick’s Day events’. They also commented that CHS proved an ideal venue, police were not required in the Square at any point as the security organised by the Council dealt so well with the event.

8.21 The Events Unit in **Belfast City Council** produced its own evaluation. The broad aims of the events they viewed as an attempt to ‘show-case the city’ to deliver a significant positive economic impact and to enhance the cultural life of the city. In addition Carnival was to ‘encourage participation by all’, provide ‘quality arts content’, improve good relations in the city through networking partnerships, and provide a family oriented event.

8.22 The Events Unit pointed out that ‘patrons were encouraged to take special St Patrick’s Day t-shirts and flags. However, this had limited impact on the number of partisan flags or other symbols.’

The report noted that there had been significant networking prior to the event. It was also pointed out that the Good Relations Unit at BCC had organised meetings with community groups before and after the event.

Amongst the report’s conclusions were the following:

- ‘Overall the St Patrick’s Day event was a reasonably successful pilot. All elements were well received by the community overall and the press coverage projected a positive image of Belfast.’
- ‘The event was managed in a safe manner with no public disorder or injury incidents. This was helped by the ban of alcohol on site and the early starting times.’

- ‘In general there was low involvement from the Protestant community. This was perhaps due to the day not being a holiday for Protestant schools. In addition some Protestant groups may also feel uncomfortable in taking part due to some symbolism, which was evident on the day.’
- ‘During the concert there were some Tricolour flags visible. It was evident that Belfast City Council could not remove such emblems, in the interest of public safety. Efforts were made to counteract this by providing free St Patrick’s Cross and multi-coloured shamrock flags, as well as t-shirts. This had a small but encouraging visible impact during the concert, but the number of Council supplied flags and t-shirts visible in the parade were very low.’

The following budge breakdown was also supplied:

| Element | Expenditure |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| Carnival Parade | £25,000 |
| Artistes/Entertainment | £18535.83 |
| Production | £43,057.28 |
| Marketing | £13,312.36 |
| Other/Miscellaneous | £5,646.25 |
| Total | £105,551.72 |
| | |
| Income | |
| Belfast City Council | £70,000 |
| Laganside | £10,000 |
| Arts Council NI | £25,000 |
| Total | £105,000 |
| | |
| Balance | - £551.72 |

8.23 St Patrick’s Day Carnival Committee (SPDCC) provided a report that made a range of comments. In regard to Good Relations they noted;

(W)e continue to encourage those communities who feel no sense of belonging to St. Patrick’s Day celebrations to engage not only with us, but also within their own community to enable debate or discussion around their

participation in the celebrations. ...We have always positively encouraged more diversity around the celebrations and we will continue to do this.

The carnival celebrations provide a platform for local communities and minority ethnic groups to get involved. This in turn lends support to communities who don't feel confident to express their identity or beliefs. We are always seeking to develop new and existing networks of communication throughout Belfast and also on an international field through the medium of art. We actively include young people, disability groups, minority groups and the language sectors in Belfast, to advance the celebrations.

The SPDCC had a number of observations about lack of communication before and during the day and some criticism of the line-up of the event including:

We agree with the aim of striving for an inclusive day, however, we also believe that serious thought should go into how that is actually done – without removing the Irishness. It is, after all, St Patrick's Day.

In terms of the community relations outcomes they believed that the Beat Initiative provided 'professional input to local groups.'

Cross community input was significant. Community liaison meetings at the City Hall brought groups together from across the city.

In terms of the management of symbols they suggest:

There was a common sense approach by the Council in terms of event guidelines in that the St Patrick's event was given equal treatment to all other Council-run activities.

We feel that the media were entirely misleading regarding the guidelines and gave the wrong impression that certain flags/emoles were not allowed at the event.

The St Patrick's cross flags that were officially distributed were not agreed and not appropriate. We are not saying that these flags are unwelcome, if people feel they need/want to bring them, however, we feel the Council should not have promoted this flag to the detriment of other flags.

We also spoke to a **unionist politician** who had attended the event. He believed that the part of the Carnival run by the Beat Initiative had been successful and that the line-up of stage performers had been good. However, his impression was that the St Patrick's Day event remained an occasion with significant displays of Irish nationalist and republican symbols and the stewards had done nothing to deal with this problem. He said that he was aware of Protestants who had come to the event and left and he remained of the belief that Protestants would find the event threatening.

Conclusions and Suggestions

8.24 The following conclusions and suggestions view the event from a Good Relations perspective:

- The St Patrick's Day Carnival is a culturally diverse event and the Beat Initiative were viewed as successful in providing a colourful part of the procession. The line-up of the stage event lacked the big name act that some would have liked but the acts were diverse and well received by spectators.
- In terms of the displaying of political symbols, specifically Tricolours, there was general agreement that there was a reduction in numbers from previous years, particularly in the Carnival procession but also at CHS.
- Nevertheless, some people carrying Tricolours were given entry to CHS and this did not strictly conform to the terms and conditions of entry provided either by Belfast City Council or Lagside Corporation. There is of course an

argument to be made that a reduction in the number of flags is better achieved through persuasion rather than through an outright ban.

- The supply of alternative flags (Cross of St Patrick and the multi-coloured Shamrock) and t-shirts by Belfast City Council was only partially successful. Community groups did not use the flags although there was widespread use of the t-shirts. In addition, the flags and t-shirts were only handed out to members of the public after they had entered CHS. If the flags had been handed out at the City Hall it may have reduced the numbers of Tricolours sold by street traders.
- A number of representatives of the nationalist community have made it clear that the Cross of St Patrick is not, in their opinion, an acceptable symbol (although it has been used successfully at the St Patrick's Day event in Downpatrick). There may be an argument for Belfast City Council, if it is to fund future events, to concentrate on the use of the green shamrock as the St Patrick's Day symbol for the city.
- The new route and venue appeared to be successful. However, it has been noted by a number of people that the City Hall may not be the ideal starting point, and that Custom House Square could have been 'dressed' to provide a greater visual impact.
- The event remains one for young people. It has been argued by a number of people that we have interviewed that this remain an event orientated to children and that more activities be provided, both at CHS and in the City Centre, for that age group.
- Whilst there is no doubt that some Protestants did become involved in the event and some were amongst the spectators there was still a lack of involvement in terms of community groups. Some have argued that this is because of the continued Irish nationalist tone of the event whilst others suggest it is because unionist politicians have refused to give the event their

backing. As mentioned above, the fact that many state schools are not closed on St Patrick's Day is also clearly an important factor.

- Compared to previous St Patrick's Day Carnivals, which a number of our observers had attended, there was a reduction in the number of Tricolours both within the Carnival, amongst spectators and at the stage event. There were also no overtly political banners. The event was a predominantly young persons' event and the atmosphere was non-threatening and friendly.
- Tricolours were, however, carried by some people, particularly teenagers, and whilst the event was not threatening, individuals from a unionist background might well still feel uncomfortable at it.
- It is unclear whether those bringing Tricolours to the event do so in order to create such an atmosphere, because they think that it is an essential part of St Patrick's Day, or because they do not realise how other people in the city might view the flag. Which ever of these it is, if Belfast City Council is to continue to run the event, it is essential that they provide a clear message as to why political symbols might be problematic in these circumstances, and put forward a positive argument for the development of 'shared space'.

9. Onsite survey of perceptions and evaluations of the St Patrick's Day event 2006

9.1 Survey Method

Survey tool:

- Questionnaires were adapted from the postal versions, hence asking about people's actual experience of the event rather than their expectations (Appendix III). For rationale for each section of questions, see chapter 7 above.

Distribution:

- The questionnaires were distributed by means of a quota sample: researchers actively targeted different demographic profiles of respondents in order to ensure an even spread of respondents along different demographic axes.
- The questionnaires were distributed evenly between the procession route and the Custom House Square event to control for differences between those attending one part of the event only. Analyses showed that perceptions of the event did not differ between respondents at these two sites.
- In total 257 respondents completed the questionnaire. Although all respondents filled out most of the questionnaire, some omitted one or two answers and so response totals in the following sections vary accordingly.

Sample:

- Characteristics of the sample: This sample is likely to be quite different from the postal sample as these people have elected to spend St Patrick's Day in the city centre and hence to some degree have already endorsed the event. However, researchers reported a very high uptake on requests to fill out the forms and hence there is likely to be less of a self-selection bias among the population of people attending the event than there was among those receiving the questionnaire by post.

- Location: 131 were approached outside Belfast City Hall and along the procession route and 126 were approached at Custom House Square
- Gender: 135 respondents were male and 119 were female. Three declined to give their gender.
- Age: Ages ranged from 17 to 81 with an average age of 35.13.

| Age | % respondents |
|-------|---------------|
| 17-25 | 28.8% |
| 25-35 | 29.9% |
| 35-45 | 19.2% |
| 45+ | 22.1% |

- Nationality: In response to an open-ended question: ‘What nationality do you consider yourself to be?’, 62.4% (161) answered Irish, 15.1% (39) answered British, 2.7% (7) answered Northern Irish and 11.6% (30) gave another answer.
- Religion: In response to a closed ended question asking respondents to provide their religious affiliation, 69.8% (180) indicated Catholic, 12.0% (31) indicated Protestant and 5.8% (15) indicated that they belonged to another religion.
- For the subsequent analyses, respondents’ answers will be given for the whole group, then broken down by religious affiliation.

9.2 Interpretations of St Patrick's Day

As in the postal questionnaire, respondents were asked 'What do you think St Patrick's Day should celebrate?' and asked to agree or disagree with a variety of items. Answers were given on a five point scale from '*strongly disagree*' to '*strongly agree*', with a midpoint of 3 for '*neither agree nor disagree*'. The table below shows the numbers of respondents answering '*agree*' or '*strongly agree*' as well as those answering '*disagree*' or '*strongly disagree*'. The remainder who answered '*neither agree nor disagree*', or left the question blank, are omitted. For ease of comparison, the proportions of respondents in these two answer categories are expressed as percentages with the actual number of respondents in brackets below:

| Item | % agreeing or strongly agreeing | % disagreeing or strongly disagreeing | Total |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| St Patrick as the patron saint of Ireland? | 94.8% (236) | 0.8% (2) | 100% (249) |
| St Patrick bringing Christianity to Ireland? | 78.8% (193) | 5.3% (13) | 100% (245) |
| Irishness | 85.5% (201) | 6.8% (16) | 100% (235) |
| All religions and traditions on the island of Ireland | 86.1% (210) | 7.0% (17) | 100% (244) |

- As with the postal survey there was a high degree of consensus among the sample that St Patrick's Day should celebrate the patron saint of Ireland, bringing Christianity to Ireland and all religions and traditions on the island of Ireland.
- However, unlike the postal survey, there was also an overwhelming agreement that St Patrick's Day should celebrate Irishness.

- If we break down the results by religion and examine the average scores of Catholics and Protestants, we see that this is because of the proportionately higher number of Catholics in the sample:

| Item | Average score for Protestants | Average score for Catholics | Average score for total sample |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| St Patrick as the patron saint of Ireland? | 4.30 | 4.79 | 4.71 |
| St Patrick bringing Christianity to Ireland? | 3.86 | 4.40 | 4.32 |
| Irishness | 3.50 | 4.58 | 4.43 |
| All religions and traditions on the island of Ireland | 4.00 | 4.44 | 4.38 |

- Although on average both Catholic and Protestant respondents agreed that St Patrick's Day should celebrate St Patrick as the patron saint of Ireland, Catholics agreed more strongly than did Protestants. This was also the case for St Patrick bringing Christianity to Ireland.
- There was a much larger difference for St Patrick's Day celebrating Irishness Protestants tending to agree much less strongly than did Catholics.
- There were no differences in agreement that St Patrick's Day should celebrate all religions and traditions on the island of Ireland.

Summary:

As in the postal survey, the issue of whether St Patrick's Day should celebrate Irishness was the most divisive for Catholics and Protestants though it should be noted that on average the Protestants attending this event did agree with this item. Likewise other group differences are a matter of strength of agreement rather than opposition between Catholic and Protestant, indicating a broad consensus as to what St Patrick's Day should celebrate.

9.3 Perceptions of previous years' events.

In line with the postal survey we assessed how those attending this year's event view previous event. Respondents were asked 'Do you think that St Patrick's Day in previous years...?'

| Item | % agreeing or strongly agreeing | % disagreeing or strongly disagreeing | Total |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Has been welcoming to everyone? | 54.5% (132) | 28.9% (70) | 100% (242) |
| Has had all communities in Belfast taking part? | 30.3% (71) | 48.7% (114) | 100% (234) |
| Has had too many symbols that could be seen as political? | 44.9% (105) | 34.6% (81) | 100% (234) |
| Has been a family day out? | 74.9% (179) | 6.7% (16) | 100% (239) |

- Broadly speaking, perceptions of previous years' events among those attending this year's event were more positive than in the postal sample.
- The majority of respondents thought that previous years' had been welcoming and a family day out, though a greater proportion disagreed that all communities had taken part.
- The sample was split as to whether there had been too many political symbols
- Examining average scores for Catholics and Protestants, we see differences on all items except having all communities taking part:

| Item | Average score for Protestants | Average score for Catholics | Average score for total sample |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Has been welcoming to everyone? | 2.65 | 3.56 | 3.44 |
| Has had all communities in Belfast taking part? | 2.37 | 2.86 | 2.80 |
| Has had too many symbols that could be seen as political? | 3.89 | 3.05 | 3.17 |
| Has been a family day out? | 3.23 | 4.28 | 4.16 |

- While both groups on average agreed that previous years' events had been a family day out, this agreement was stronger among Protestants.
- Protestants agreed more strongly that there had been too many political symbols at previous events; Catholic opinion was more mixed.
- Catholics on average agreed and Protestants disagreed that previous events had been welcoming.
- Both groups concurred that previous events had not included all communities in Belfast.

Summary:

As in the postal survey, most respondents acknowledged that past events have not adhered to the BCC ideal model of an inclusive event. However, previous events are rated positively in terms of being welcoming and a family day out. Once more Protestants tended to evaluate previous events more negatively than did Catholics.

9.4 Perceptions of this year's event.

Perhaps the most important aspects of the onsite survey were respondents' reactions to the event itself. People were asked 'Do you think that this year's event...?':

| Item | % agreeing or strongly agreeing | % disagreeing or strongly disagreeing | Total |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Is welcoming to everyone? | 84.1% (212) | 9.1% (23) | 100% (252) |
| Has all communities in Belfast taking part? | 52.9% (128) | 27.7% (67) | 100% (242) |
| Has too many symbols that could be seen as political? | 29.2% (70) | 52.5% (126) | 100% (240) |
| Is a family day out? | 88.6% (217) | 4.5% (11) | 100% (245) |

- The vast majority of respondents agreed that the event was welcoming to all and a family day out.
- Estimations of inclusiveness were mixed with over half agreeing, but over a quarter disagreeing that the event had all communities in Belfast taking part.
- Opinions on the level of political symbolism was also split with almost a third agreeing that there were too many symbols but over half disagreeing.
- Breaking these down into average scores for Catholics and Protestants we see group differences for all items, except estimations of the degree of participation of all communities:

| Item | Average score for Protestants | Average score for Catholics | Average score for total sample |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Is welcoming to everyone? | 3.47 | 4.28 | 4.16 |
| Has all communities in Belfast taking part? | 2.90 | 3.45 | 3.37 |
| Has too many symbols that could be seen as political? | 3.37 | 2.56 | 2.68 |
| Is a family day out? | 3.57 | 4.48 | 4.34 |

- While both Catholics and Protestants tended to agree that the day was welcoming and a family day out, Catholics agreed more strongly.
- There was some disagreement as to whether there were too many political symbols with Catholics on average disagreeing and Protestants agreeing.

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | Average score on 5pt scale |
|------------|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Protestant | 4 | 4 | 6 | 9 | 7 | 3.37 |
| Catholic | 31 | 70 | 29 | 20 | 19 | 2.56 |

- 53.3% of Protestants agreed or strongly agreed that there were too many symbols that could be seen as political while 26.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- 23.1% of Catholics agreed or strongly agreed with this item while 59.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- Although on average Catholics agreed that the event had all communities taking part while Protestants tended to disagree, this difference was small and statistically insignificant. On balance people gave mixed responses as to the degree of inclusiveness at this year's event.

Summary

Overall the event is rated very positively by those attending and in line with the BCC ideal model of an inclusive, welcoming family day out. It is notable that the event was rated as more 'welcoming' than 'inclusive of different groups', suggesting that people saw the event as potentially inclusive, but recognised that it has some way to go to achieve cross community support.

Where differences between Protestants and Catholics exist, they are a matter of degree rather than opposition: Protestants tend to rate the event positively, but Catholics are stronger in their endorsement. The exception to this pattern is the evaluation of political symbols, where the majority of Protestants agree that there are too many and the majority of Catholics disagree. However, again it must be pointed out that this is not a completely divided perspective: almost a quarter of Catholics agree that there are too many symbols and a similar proportion of Protestants disagree.

9.5 Reported level of comfort at the event

Respondents at the event are best placed to assess whether the event met the BCC goal of enabling all the residents of Belfast to be comfortable at the event. We asked 'How do you feel about being at this event?'. Answers were again recorded on a five point scale from '*very uncomfortable*' to '*very comfortable*', with a midpoint of 3 for '*neither comfortable nor uncomfortable*'.

| | Very Uncomfortable | Quite Uncomfortable | Neither Comfortable nor Uncomfortable | Quite Comfortable | Very comfortable | TOTAL |
|-------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------|
| Total | 8 | 9 | 20 | 60 | 155 | 252 |

- The vast majority of those attending the event (85.3%) felt comfortable or very comfortable
- Breaking these down by religion we see a substantial difference in Catholic and Protestant responding:

| Number answering: | Very Uncomfortable | Quite Uncomfortable | Neither Comfortable nor Uncomfortable | Quite Comfortable | Very comfortable | Average score on 5pt scale |
|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Protestant | 4 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 3.29 (31) |
| Catholic | 3 | 3 | 8 | 43 | 122 | 4.55 (179) |

- Of Catholic respondents, the majority (93.2%) reported feeling quite comfortable or very comfortable as reflected in the high average score.
- Of Protestant respondents, 29% reported feeling some degree of discomfort and 45% felt quite or very comfortable. While the Protestant comfort ratings were on aggregate substantially and significantly lower than that for Catholics, the average Protestant score indicated a degree of comfort at the event.

Summary:

In contrast to the expectations of those responding to the postal survey, the majority of Protestants as well as Catholics reported feeling ‘quite’ or ‘very’ comfortable at the event. However, a greater proportion of Protestants relative to Catholics reported some level of discomfort.

9.6 Perceptions of group comfort at the event

Attending the event allows people to feel for themselves the atmosphere and see the environment. On this basis they should be well placed to imagine how others from their own group and the other community feel at the event. In order to examine the relationship between level of comfort and perceived political preference, we asked them to rate how comfortable they thought ‘nationalists’ and ‘unionists’ would feel at the event.

| | Very or quite comfortable | Very or quite uncomfortable | Total |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| How would nationalists feel? | 92.0% (231) | 2.0% (5) | 100% (251) |
| How would unionists feel? | 37.2% (93) | 41.2% (103) | 100% (250) |

- The vast majority of those attending the event reported that nationalist would feel quite or very comfortable.
- The sample was split on whether unionists would feel comfortable or not.
- There were no differences between Catholic and Protestant expectations of how comfortable nationalists or unionists would feel at the event.
- Both Catholics and Protestants gave mixed estimations as to how unionists would feel:

| | Very Uncomfortable | Quite Uncomfortable | Neither Comfortable nor Uncomfortable | Quite Comfortable | Very comfortable | Total |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Protestant | 10 32.3% | 7 22.6% | 6 19.4% | 7 22.6% | 1 3.2% | 31 100% |
| Catholic | 35 19.4% | 37 20.6% | 36 20.0% | 49 27.2% | 20 11.3% | 177 100% |

Summary:

There was an overwhelming consensus that nationalists felt comfortable at the event and an average rating of unionists as less comfortable. Notably both Catholics and Protestants gave mixed evaluations of unionists' feelings, reflecting a range of perspectives within each group on this issue

Conclusions:

- The onsite survey supports many of the postal survey findings:
 - There is a degree of agreement among both Catholics and Protestants as to what St Patrick's Day should celebrate, though disagreement over the specific issue of celebrating Irishness.
 - There is a general consensus that previous St Patrick's Day events have not been a welcoming, inclusive event for all communities. This perception is stronger among Protestants.
- The vast majority of respondents rated the event as welcoming and a family day out, though assessments of the inclusiveness of the event were mixed.
- Notably, though a majority of Protestants thought that there were too many political symbols and a majority of Catholics did not, substantial proportions of each group adopted the counter position. In other words, there was a mixed perception of the level of political symbols within both groups.
- The majority of the sample reported that they felt comfortable or very comfortable at the event. On average, both Catholics and Protestants reported a degree of comfort, though Catholics reported significantly higher comfort.
- There was a consensus across the sample that nationalists would feel more comfortable at the event than unionists. However, both Catholic and Protestant estimates of unionist comfort were mixed suggesting a variety of opinions as to what would cause discomfort for unionists.
- In general then, the recorded perceptions of both Catholics and Protestants at the event suggest that if the event was not entirely inclusive, neither was it entirely exclusive. In fact, there is substantial evidence to suggest that people viewed the event as adhering to the BCC model of a welcoming family day out for everyone but there were mixed opinions as to the degree of inclusion of all communities and the level of symbols.

10. Media coverage of the St Patrick's Day event.

10.1 As illustrated in chapter 6 above, the media coverage preceding the St Patrick's Day event perpetuated longstanding debates over what St Patrick's Day should celebrate and focused largely on the issue of symbol regulation. The coverage had been complicated by competing versions of what would happen at the event. These competing attitudes and opinions were in circulation right up to the morning of the event itself.

10.2 Television coverage

Against this broader media background, the television coverage of the event was broadcast on the afternoon and evening of the 17th March. Most reports were brief, lasting between 1 and 2 minutes. As with the print coverage preceding the event, the coverage of the day itself varied widely, both in the content of what was reported, the evaluations of the event and the camera footage itself.

UTV Live: lunchtime report

The lunchtime UTV news report featured a brief (1 min 10 sec) report from City Hall, where crowds were beginning to gather for the procession. It pointed out that this was the first time that BCC had organised the event and that it was intended to be inclusive.

The report asserted that there was a ban 'on drink and flags', but did not specify whether this applied to the entire event or CHS only. Hence, instances where flags were in evidence were presented as breaches of the ban. Of eight camera shots of the area around the City Hall, four clearly focused in on Tricolours. The reported stated 'But in the last half hour at the city hall, a number of people gathering for the parade to the square have ignored the ban, though they are in the minority'.

The Deputy Lord Mayor was interviewed and asked about these flags. He denied that BCC had any responsibility for or control over flags held by people

in the city centre. However on the issue of the inclusiveness of the event at this stage he said:

‘People have not been as inclusive as they could be, but having said that, people have to recognise that flags are flags. There are young people running around here with all different colours of flags and the situation is that we want to make it a day to remember for everyone’.

UTV Live: evening report

The second report was slightly longer (2mins 20 sec) and focused mainly on the CHS event, with only one brief shot of the procession. Once more the camera focus was on Tricolours with 7 of 10 shots of the crowd clearly focusing on flags rather than on people or performers. The report itself began with the assertion that loyalists had said that their concerns over the event had been borne out and that one councillor reported that it was ‘the green 12th of previous years’.

The ban on ‘flags and emblems as well as alcohol’ was mentioned and contrasted to the footage of Tricolours in the crowd ‘it quickly became apparent that many people had simply ignored restrictions’. The reporter was framed against a background of a Lambeg drum playing on stage. Immediately behind, four young boys with Tricolours were ‘playing up’ to the camera. He stated ‘So much for beating the drum for inclusivity. A Lambeg drum playing amid a sea of Tricolours’.

Two unionist councillors were interviewed and presented very negative interpretations of the event. One said that there were so many representations of nationalism and republicanism that unionists would feel uncomfortable coming to the event. Another said that those of her constituents who did attend felt isolated and vulnerable. A crowd member who evidently was from a unionist background was interviewed and also gave a negative reaction to the level of political symbolism.

The interview with the Deputy Lord Mayor broadcast in the earlier report was reused. His comments regarding flags at Belfast City Hall were presented as reflecting his stance on flags at the CHS event.

The report ended by emphasising that the event necessitated a major review of the situation which would determine what would happen in future years.

BBC Newsline coverage

This report (2 mins) began by mentioning that BCC was funding this year's event and that unionists who opposed it thought that the event had 'failed the cross-community test'. However, it did not refer to a ban on political symbols and the camera footage contained proportionately fewer close-ups on individual flags (4 of 15 shots of the crowds).

The report evenly covered both the procession and the CHS event. During footage of the procession the reported noted 'Irish Tricolours and football shirts were in the minority as the parade passed along Donegal Place'. Coverage of CHS was accompanied by the statement 'the hope was to make this a more cross community event. Nevertheless, the predominant colour in CHS was green, white and gold'.

Two members of the audience were interviewed. One thought the event lacked the atmosphere of previous years, the other thought the event was an improvement as it was more enclosed and controlled than in the past.

The Deputy Lord Mayor was interviewed on site, saying 'The thing is we live in a free society and we have to get people to move forward one step at a time, you can't just dictate what people wear. And that's what we're trying to do by putting on a cross community event. And we hope that the people who are here enjoy it and go out and spread the word and we will be back here next year enjoying a bigger and better event'

The report ended saying that 'in the words of the organisers "it's a start"'

RTE Six One News

The RTE coverage of the event (2mins 10 secs) began by mentioning that the BCC was organising the event in an attempt to make it cross community. It framed the core issue as one of security stating that ‘so far the celebrations have passed off without incident’.

The report had much less footage of flags and emblems than did the other two (only one close up of a Tricolour) perhaps under-representing the display of political symbols. The issue of symbols was framed in a positive rather than a negative way: ‘The symbol was the multicoloured shamrock and the flag of St Patrick. The intention was to make it a more inclusive event for all sections of the community’. A shot of a woman and pram with Tricolour was accompanied by the statement ‘In the end some people still preferred to display Tricolours’.

The Deputy Lord Mayor was interviewed, saying ‘Belfast is moving forward and it is time that we all, including our political representatives and our people, we all started to realise that we are moving forward and to stop looking back’. The report picks up on this positive tone by emphasising ‘The concert was intended to show the new face of Belfast, a city made up of different cultures, all of which can be celebrated together’.

The report ended by again promoting security concerns over the issue of symbols: ‘The council will certainly be pleased that the St Patrick’s Day parade which they sponsored for the first time has passed off without trouble and they’ll be hoping that it provides an example for future years.’

10.3 Analysis of television coverage

These three reports illustrate how the St Patrick’s Day events in the city centre can be presented very differently. Rather than simply assuming that each reporter or station has a particular political bias, we can examine how and why the same evidence can be interpreted differently in each account. Broadly speaking it would appear that because each report takes a different position on the purpose of the event and expectations of what would happen, the evidence is therefore presented to the viewer very differently in each case.

This is most clearly evident in the RTE coverage. This differs from the other two in that it sets up security issues as the main concern of the Council rather than symbol regulation. Therefore, in these terms, the event is clearly a success. Where symbols are mentioned, it is in the context of promoting an inclusive multicultural celebration day and, although Tricolours are featured as detracting from the inclusiveness of the day, this is not presented as necessarily undermining the entire event.

In contrast, the UTV Live reports take the ban on symbols as their central focus. It is not made clear whether the ban is to be enforced at the City Hall as well as CHS and so any Tricolours are taken to constitute evidence that the day has failed. This is particularly evident in the first report in which, although Tricolours were relatively scarce at the City Hall, half the camera footage is devoted to singling out those which are present. Likewise, in the later report the camera footage and the rhetoric of the reporter give an exaggerated impression of the actual number of flags present as the news story is in essence the significance of the breach of regulations. The equating of the presence of symbols with the failure of the event is supported by interviews with unionist councillors and the Deputy Lord Mayor's statement (in relation to spectators at the City Hall) that flags could not be controlled. In other words, the failure of the ban is taken to be the failure of the day.

The BBC Newsline report adopts a different stance, focusing on the regulation of symbols but evaluating the event on its inclusiveness. Therefore, it highlights both the relative absence of Tricolours in the procession and the evidence of 'green, white and gold' at the CHS event. However, this is considered in terms of its impact on cross community participation rather than the success or otherwise of symbol regulation for its own sake. Unionists are quoted as having said that it has failed on this account while the Deputy Lord Mayor is shown to argue that it is a progressive move. The report itself adopts an intermediate position of suggesting that it is 'a start'.

The wider implication of these television reports is that the event is not evaluated afresh by the media, but immediately falls into distinctive patterns of understanding according to the expectations which commentators brought to the occasion. In other words, the success or failure of the event depended heavily on the media debate conducted prior to the event itself. As outlined below, this pattern also holds for the print media.

10.4 Newspaper coverage of the St Patrick's Day event: Symbols

The event received considerable coverage in the main local papers as well as some of the local editions of the tabloid newspapers (*Sun*, 18th March; *Daily Mirror*, 18th March). Of the 16 articles we collected on the 18th March, 11 mentioned the symbols dispute as part of their coverage. In line with the television coverage, reports presented the event in one of three main ways according to the position they took on the regulation of symbols – as a ban, as encouragement or as an absence of a ban:

- Articles maintaining that the Council had banned symbols pointed out that despite this, there were indeed Tricolours present at the event and as such it was a failure. For example the *News Letter* (18th March) headline stated Tricolour still prevails despite hopes for a neutral parade and reported: 'Tricolours and sectarian symbols had been banned from the event, but while the parade began with little signs of the rules being flouted, their numbers soon grew, as did those of Celtic football shirts'.
- Articles presenting the symbols issue as one of advising people to voluntarily leave symbols out of the event, typically reported the presence of political symbols but pointed to the relatively low level of symbolism as a success. Notably two articles in the *Irish News* (a paper which had hitherto reported a 'ban' on symbols) reformulated this retrospectively to a 'warning' (18th March, p5) and stated that 'Those attending had been asked not to bring flags or wear football shirts in an attempt to make the event more inclusive' (18th, p4). In line with this view, the Deputy Lord Mayor is reported to have said 'It is a small step forward in a divided city. There are a minimal number of

Tricolours and Celtic shirts on show but we are living in a free society and we can't dictate to people what to wear' (*Daily Mirror*, 18th March).

- Another interpretation was published in *Daily Ireland* where an article depicted the issue of regulation of symbols as irrelevant. Here, the crowd attending the event were described as 'shamrock-clad' but there is no reference to Tricolours or football tops or any controversy arising from their presence. Accordingly, a member of the organising committee is quoted as saying that 'We had to dispel some rumours going about, such as Tricolours being banned from the event'. In other words the presence of symbols was not presented as a problem.

In sum, the reporting of the event was depicted in different ways according to the different expectations held about the implementation or otherwise of a 'ban' on symbols. Articles repeating that there was a 'ban' reported that the event had failed. The more moderate mid-ground adopted the language of encouragement and advice and acknowledged that an absence of symbols had not been achieved but presented the much reduced level of flags and emblems as progress. A further perspective which presented the notion of regulation of symbols as misinformation did not present the presence of flags or football shirts as a problem.

10.5 Newspaper Coverage: Inclusiveness

These different types of coverage of the event consequently characterised the inclusiveness of the event in different ways. For those concentrating on the failure of the regulation of symbols, the day was thus taken to be an exclusive republican event. Unionist councillors are reported in a *News Letter* article (18th March) as saying that the parade was 'disappointing and unwelcoming' and had included shows of republican 'triumphalism'. Moreover, some reported that their unionist constituents who did attend felt uncomfortable and unwelcome and left the event because of the sheer number of Tricolours (*Belfast Telegraph*, 18th March). In other words, the event was characterised as an exclusive single identity event which the BCC failed to regulate and control. Subsequent reports and letters in the following week adopted the same tone.

Ironically, coverage of the event from the contrary perspective adopted the same understanding of the event. As the coverage in *Daily Ireland* (18th March) reported, one member of the carnival committee commented: ‘It was great to see people wearing shamrock in the city centre and that people can be Irish in the city just like others throughout the country’. Despite the reference to shamrock instead of flags or emblems, this clearly falls into the broader narrative of St Patrick’s Day as an expression of a single identity of Irishness. A later article (*North Belfast News*, 25th March) went further, arguing that flags were deliberately brought to the event as a matter of principle to protest against unequal parity of esteem for Irish symbols. In other words, the event was formulated as a matter of resistance to unionist control, much in the same fashion as unionist councillors were stressing control against nationalist resistance.

A minority of reports did attempt to go beyond the rhetoric of identity expression and control and more thoroughly engage with the issue of the extent the event to which the event was cooperatively inclusive. The *Irish News* reported the Deputy Lord Mayor as saying that the event was very successful and had included some people attending on a cross-community basis (*Irish News*, 18th March). Likewise the *Andersonstown News* reported that ‘The council aimed for a cross-community event and SDLP Deputy Lord Mayor Pat Convery said he thought this had been achieved to a “certain degree”’.

This range of perspectives was also reflected in letters to the various newspapers after the event. Some criticised the level of political symbolism as reflecting that nationalists were unwilling to accept unionist participation in the event (‘Belfast has more than one culture’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 20th March; ‘Green behaviour bodes ill for future’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 23rd March). Others argued that unionists should not be offended or intimidated by Tricolours or Celtic tops (‘Celtic Jersey Did Not Deserve Red Card’, *Irish News*, 21st March; ‘Well Done’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 23rd). A small range of more complex positions were also evident with one reader criticising both the presence of flags and unionist overreaction (‘Flagging Fortunes’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 23rd March) and another,

claiming to be a Protestant, stressing the positive atmosphere of the day and criticising the negative publicity the event had received beforehand Belfast Telegraph ('In Praise of the Big Parade', *Belfast Telegraph*, 20th March).

Conclusions

- The different messages about the event in circulation can be seen to have contributed to very different expectations of what would happen on the day. In turn the media presented a variety of very different interpretations of what had happened.
- Three contrasting television reports: RTE, UTV Live and BBC Newsline capture this divergence and highlight the tendency by some coverage to sensationalise the event.
- The subsequent coverage and letters from the public returned to the polarised positions preceding the event in which the majority of reports characterised St Patrick's Day as a single identity phenomenon rather than an inclusive celebration.
- A small midground of non-partisan accounts did emphasise the progress that had been made on previous years.

11. Summary of findings

11.1 Media (and political) controversy surrounding the event has largely eclipsed BCC's Good Relations message. While the BCC press release of 5th July was constructive in tone and set out a new understanding of the St Patrick's Day event as a collaborative cooperation between Council, Carnival Committee and community groups, the press coverage quickly returned to the longstanding depiction of the event as a sectarian power struggle. This was perpetuated by unconstructive press reporting of council discussions as well as overt disagreement between individual councillors and with Carnival Committee members. As a consequence there were widely divergent expectations of what would happen on the day.

11.2 Popular opinion about the event beforehand was ambivalent as to whether the event was likely to be inclusive or not. As the political commentary and media coverage of the event was inconsistent and contradictory, it is unsurprising that a variety of attitudes towards the event existed in both main communities in Belfast. Our interviews suggested a degree of uncertainty as to what would actually happen at the event, especially among Protestant community groups and the postal survey indicated a range of expectations within both Protestant and Catholic communities.

11.3 The number of political symbols on display at the event was lower than in previous years and low in absolute terms. Our monitoring of the event indicated a low frequency of political symbols relative to previous years' events. The procession was by and large free of political symbols though a few were carried by casual participants in the local community sections. There were very few in evidence outside City Hall and most that were visible were small plastic flags of the type sold by street-vendors. At CHS we counted 98 Tricolours entering the grounds of an admittance of over 4000 people and only around 20 were visible in the crowd at any one time.

11.4 Although briefed to ‘persuade and encourage’ individuals to replace political symbols at CHS stewards were not successful in this task. The task was made difficult by the large number of people arriving at CHS in a short period of time.

11.5 The strategy of BCC to introduce alternative symbols in the form of St Patrick’s Carnival Shamrock t-shirts, Cross of St Patrick and multicoloured shamrock flags was a partial success. Community groups did not use the flags although there was widespread use of the t-shirts. The flags, however, proved popular when handed out at CHS. The few Tricolours that were in evidence at City Hall were possibly as a result of street-vendors in that area.

11.6 The atmosphere of the event could not be described as hostile. From our monitoring of the day, the atmosphere during the event was positive and while there were political symbols in evidence, these were mostly displayed by younger teenagers. Onlookers may have had different opinions as to the appropriateness of the symbols at the event, but we noted little evidence that the symbols were displayed in an aggressive or threatening manner or were perceived as such. From the onsite survey, both Catholics and Protestants were generally positive about the event, seeing it as welcoming and as a family day out. However, reactions to the level of political symbols were mixed for both Catholics and Protestants.

11.7 There was little evidence of a substantial attendance from Protestant communities. Our interviews before the event indicated that some Protestant community groups were waiting to see how this year’s event would turn out before deciding whether or not to participate in future events. In addition to the absence of Protestant community groups in the procession there was little evidence of large numbers in the audience. Using our onsite survey as a rough indicator, only 31 of 257 (or 12%) surveyed indicated that they were Protestant.

11.9 Those attending the event, including those from the Protestant community, generally indicated that they viewed it positively. The majority respondents to

our onsite survey thought the event was welcoming and a family day out. This overall positive perception of the event was characteristic of Protestants as well as Catholics.

11.10 Protestants did tend to express dissatisfaction with the presence of political symbols and some reported that they felt uncomfortable at the event.

Although as noted above, reactions to the level of political symbols was mixed for Catholics as well as Protestants, on average Protestants expressed greater dissatisfaction. Moreover, although 45% of Protestants reported feeling comfortable at the event, 29% reported feeling uncomfortable.

11.11 Most media coverage and political commentary afterwards adopted a partisan single-identity position.

In line with the media coverage before the event, reports of the day largely focused either on the success or otherwise of the regulation of symbols or on the success of the day as an expression of Irishness. The issue of whether the event had been a step towards a more inclusive event for all communities in Belfast generally came second to these more partisan concerns.

12. Conclusions

12.1 This year's event was not a fully inclusive event, but neither was it an exclusive, intimidating one. This year's event had no direct participation from Protestant community groups and had a low overall turnout from the Protestant community and so in this sense was not fully inclusive. However, given the lower level of political symbols and the positive atmosphere during the event it could not be described as intentionally or aggressively exclusive.

12.2 It occurred in a relatively tense political atmosphere in which the Council's message of inclusiveness was largely ignored. The media coverage of the St Patrick's Day event has tended to focus on the negative element of the symbols controversy at the expense of the core issue of the potential inclusiveness of the event. In part this is attributable to an element of sensationalism in reports, but the coverage does also mirror opinions from councillors and organisers that have depicted the issue as one of possession and control rather than cooperation and inclusion.

12.3 With the short time-frame, there were organisational as well as political difficulties in delivering an inclusive event. As the final decision to fund the event was only made in January, organisers and interested groups were placed under considerable pressure. In addition to the normal logistical difficulties of putting together a large scale public event, time constraints clearly affected the potential of cross community cooperation and inclusion of Protestant groups.

12.4 Despite all these factors, the Council would appear to have gone some way towards creating the welcoming environment in which a properly inclusive event could take place in the future. The bulk of evidence in this report points to the interpretation of the event as progressing towards meeting BCC's stated goal of having 'an inclusive event which can be enjoyed by everyone in the city whatever their background'. However, this was only a partial success and this year's event cannot be considered an acceptable endpoint to the process of making the event inclusive.

12.5 More broadly, public opinion does not appear to be as polarised as media and political commentary suggests and some latitude for cooperation between the communities exists. Our surveys and interviews suggest that although the issue of whether St Patrick’s Day should predominantly celebrate Irishness is a divisive one, the occasion does sustain enough interest within both communities to constitute a viable site of cross community celebration.

12.6 This year, nationalists have demonstrated a willingness to curb the number of political symbols at the event. Despite the fact that very different messages concerning the regulation of symbols were in circulation, the lower levels of flags and football tops indicate that many nationalists did make some effort to take unionist concerns into consideration.

12.7 Likewise Protestant community groups have already demonstrated some willingness to take part within forums such as the Beat Initiative’s steering group. From our interviews with Protestant community groups there is interest and, in principle, a willingness to celebrate St Patrick’s Day among Protestant communities in Belfast. Though there is some apprehension about the main city centre event, there was some engagement by Protestant groups with the Beat Initiative at an early stage and some interest has been expressed in a longer term engagement with a view to future participation.

12.8 The message of inclusiveness now needs to be promoted and the Good Relations strategy actively pursued if BCC wishes to take the event forward. It is clear that the message of inclusivity is not getting across to the public. In order to rectify this, a more strategic use of the media and direct engagement with community groups is necessary to promote and deliver an inclusive event next year. In line with *A Shared Future* this could be done with reference to the importance of ‘shared space’ in the city.

13. Recommendations

Planning Issues

13.1 Provide a longer period for planning and preparation. This was the main difficulty mentioned to us by those involved in the organisation of the event. A longer time frame would take pressure off the organisers and also make planning decisions less rushed and more open to negotiation between all parties involved.

13.2 Facilitate long-term networking between organisers and participating groups, especially with community groups in Protestant areas. Though this year's event was a move towards inclusivity, much work still needs to be done to encourage Protestant participation. Various forums for cross community discussion, such as the Beat Initiative's steering group and the BCC consultation group, need to be sustained throughout the year to foster the trust and interest necessary to make the event properly inclusive next year.

13.3 Take advantage of the event occurring at the weekend over the next two years. As St Patrick's Day is not a public holiday, people will have been prevented from attending the event by having to attend work. As the event falls on a Saturday next year there is room for greater participation. Another barrier to participation was the fact that some children were unable to attend the event as they were at school. The next two years afford the chance of greater participation among the school-aged population.

13.4 Push for St Patrick's Day as a public holiday. There is already broad cross community political support for making St Patrick's Day a public holiday. This would both give the day further official sanction and facilitate long term participation from groups who would otherwise not be able to attend. Alternatively, the St Patrick's Day Carnival in Belfast could be held on the nearest Saturday to the 17th March.

13.5 Consider courting sponsorship for next year. Sponsorship would alleviate some of the financial burden on the Council and provide a branding and marketing of the event over and above BCC's or the Carnival Committee's own appeal.

Media

The symbols debate dominated the press coverage and overshadowed the more important issue of inclusiveness. While the issue of symbols is clearly central to the successful management of St Patrick's Day, it was presented as one of a sectarian power struggle rather than cross community cooperation. In order to reconstruct the debate in favour of inclusiveness, BCC should actively promote its own message of good relations, and shared space, against other opinions of the event:

13.6 BCC should take a clearer position on the event. If the end-goal is to make the event inclusive for all communities, it must be obvious to all taking part that this is a Good Relations project and not a single identity exercise. It needs to be made clear that 'inclusivity' does not mean that the unionist community are 'offered the opportunity' to attend a nationalist event, but that the council are working towards creating an event that is shared by all in Belfast.

13.7 This requires a positive message which promotes inclusiveness rather than a 'watering down' of a nationalist event. The crux of the message should be that St Patrick's Day incorporates all interpretations of the day but in the particular context of Belfast, and a Carnival funded by the City Council, representations of Irishness need to take into consideration unionists' concerns.

13.8 Any regulation of symbols should be accompanied by a clear rationale of 'shared space' to prevent misinterpretation as being anti-Irish. The main obstacle to resolving the symbols debate is the perception that symbols are desirable or undesirable *for their own sake*. By making it clear that the regulation of symbols has a purpose and will facilitate an inclusive event in which all interpretations of St Patrick's Day are welcome, including an Irish interpretation, people have a positive reason to adhere to the guidelines.

13.9 Realistic goals for the inclusiveness of the event need to be agreed beforehand. Establishing clear criteria by which the inclusiveness of the event can be judged would both help prevent conflicting interpretations of the event afterwards and build confidence with wider communities that the event was judged fairly. It is unrealistic to expect a complete absence of political symbols at next year's event. In terms of the inclusiveness of the event, some measure of participation and attendance from all communities could be established, building on this monitoring report, to assure all involved that the event is indeed working towards an end-goal of a full inclusivity.

13.10 Press misinformation should be proactively challenged. Due to negligence or wilful misinterpretation, some press coverage contained factual inaccuracies such as the 'ban' on face-paints and green shamrocks. The press should be encouraged to take a more responsible attitude to reporting the Carnival.

Symbols

There are also a number of practical steps BCC could take in order to address the symbols issue at next year's event.

13.11 Dressing the concert area to give a green and white theme to the entire event would make political symbols less obvious. It is unreasonable to expect a complete absence of Tricolours at future events, but it is possible to make the few which are present less conspicuous by providing a coloured context of green and white.

13.12 More, and larger, Council flags should be distributed as a positive highly visible alternative to any political symbols. These could be handed out at City Hall to undercut street sellers. The main source of Tricolours on the day were sold on site rather than brought to the event. By making a free alternative available to onlookers, the demand for these could be much reduced. This year the Council flags were noticeably less visible than the Tricolour equivalents - by making the Council flags larger, their relative visual impact would be increased.

13.13 The Council could consider promoting the green shamrock as a positive symbol with appeal to both Catholics and Protestants. This would have the twofold impact providing a green and white colour theme to the entire event as well as undermining media criticism of unnecessary regulation of this neutral symbol. The City Council might consider investing in a logo incorporating 'Belfast' and 'the Shamrock' to brand the event in the city over a number of years.

13.14 BCC should liaise with appropriate sports organisations regarding the use of sports shirts as sectarian symbols. Due to the cold weather it was difficult to accurately assess the numbers of football shirts worn to the event under coats and hence the efficacy of the Council strategy of providing t-shirts. A longer term strategy might be to involve sports organisations, particularly Glasgow Celtic and Rangers Football Clubs, in discussions about the use of their merchandise as sectarian markers at such cross community events and explore means of promoting an anti-sectarian message.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Terms and Conditions of BCC Events

Appendix II: St Patrick's Day postal questionnaire

Appendix III: St Patrick's Day onsite survey

Appendix I: Belfast City Council, Events Terms and Conditions

- Access to the event will be on a first come first serve basis
- Absolutely no alcohol will be sold, consumed or allowed on site
- Flags, emblems or paraphernalia of a political, sectarian, racist or partisan nature will not be permitted on site
- No football jerseys
- No glassware, tins, barbeques or naked flames. Umbrellas will be permitted, but may be restricted in their use
- Once on site you will assume all risk of injury and all responsibility for property loss, destruction or theft, and releases organisers, performers, sponsors, venue, and their employees from any liability thereafter.
- Food facilities will be provided
- No dogs except guide dogs
- Children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult
- Custom House Square will close on Thursday 16th March from 6pm and reopen for the concert at 1pm on 17th March.
- The event will happen come rain or shine, please dress appropriately for the weather
- The event will finish at approximately 4pm
- No bicycles
- No car parking available
- Access terms and conditions will be displayed at the entrance to the site
- Belfast City Council has the right to refuse admission
- If you leave the site you may not be able to re-enter, but this will be at the discretion of the stewards on the day of the event
- Before entering the site you may be subject to a search, as appropriate
- Belfast City Council reserves the right to make any alterations to the advertised details for the performance
- All attendees consent to the filming and sound recording of themselves as members of the audience
- Smoke effects, strobe lighting, lasers and loud noises may be used at this event
- This information was correct at the time of going to print; Belfast City Council does not accept responsibility for any omissions or changes to the information

Appendix II: St Patrick's Day Questionnaire (postal version)

We are interested in your experiences of St Patrick's Day in the past and what you expect from this year's event. Please read the questions carefully and tick the box you think best fits your own experiences and beliefs.

1. Have you attended the St Patrick's Day event in Belfast city centre before? Yes No

2. Do you intend to go to the St Patrick's Day event this year? Yes No

3. What do you think St Patrick's Day should celebrate?

| | <i>Strongly Agree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Strongly Disagree</i> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| St Patrick as the patron saint of Ireland? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| St Patrick bringing Christianity to Ireland? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Irishness? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| All religions and traditions on the island of Ireland? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other (please specify) _____

4. Do you think that St Patrick's Day in Belfast in previous years:

| | <i>Strongly Agree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Strongly Disagree</i> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Has been welcoming to everyone? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Has had all communities in Belfast taking part? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Has had too many symbols that could be seen as political? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Has been a family day out? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. Do you think that this year's event:

| | <i>Strongly Agree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Strongly Disagree</i> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Will be welcoming to everyone? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Will have all communities in Belfast taking part? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Will have too many symbols that could be seen as political? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Will be a family day out? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. If YOU were to go to this year's event, how do you think you would feel?

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Very comfortable</i> | <i>Quite comfortable</i> | <i>Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable</i> | <i>Quite uncomfortable</i> | <i>Very uncomfortable</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. How do you think the following groups would feel at the event?

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| | <i>Very comfortable</i> | <i>Quite comfortable</i> | <i>Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable</i> | <i>Quite uncomfortable</i> | <i>Very uncomfortable</i> |
| Nationalists | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unionists | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ethnic minorities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Some details about yourself:

Age: _____ Sex: Male Female

Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion? Yes No

How would you describe that religious tradition? Protestant Catholic Other

What do you consider your nationality to be _____(write in).

| | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | <i>Strongly</i> | <i>Weakly</i> | <i>Not at all</i> |
| How strongly do you feel yourself to be British | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| How strongly do you feel yourself to be Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| How strongly do you feel yourself to have an Ulster identity | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| How strongly do you feel yourself to be Northern Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Thank you for completing our questionnaire!
Please post it back to us in the enclosed freepost envelope.

Appendix III: St Patrick's Day Questionnaire (onsite version)

Our team of researchers at Queen's University is conducting a survey of how people see this year's St Patrick's Day event in the city centre. We would be very grateful if you would take a few minutes to fill out our questionnaire. Your answers will be anonymous and confidential. Please read the questions carefully and tick the box you think best fits your own experiences and beliefs.

1. Have you attended the St Patrick's Day event in Belfast city centre before? Yes No

2. What do you think St Patrick's Day should celebrate?

| | <i>Strongly Agree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Neither Agree nor Disagree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Strongly Disagree</i> |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| St Patrick as the patron saint of Ireland? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| St Patrick bringing Christianity to Ireland? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Irishness? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| All religions and traditions on the island of Ireland? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other (please specify) _____

3. Do you think that St Patrick's Day in Belfast in previous years:

| | <i>Strongly Agree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Neither nor Disagree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Strongly Disagree</i> |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Has been welcoming to everyone? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Has had all communities in Belfast taking part? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Has had too many symbols that could be seen as political? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Has been a family day out? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4. Do you think that this year's event:

| | <i>Strongly Agree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Neither nor Disagree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Strongly Disagree</i> |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Is welcoming to everyone? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Has all communities in Belfast taking part? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Has too many symbols that could be seen as political? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is a family day out? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. How do you feel about being at this event?

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Very comfortable</i> | <i>Quite comfortable</i> | <i>Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable</i> | <i>Quite uncomfortable</i> | <i>Very uncomfortable</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. How do you think the following groups feel at the event?

| | <i>Very comfortable</i> | <i>Quite comfortable</i> | <i>Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable</i> | <i>Quite uncomfortable</i> | <i>Very uncomfortable</i> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Nationalists | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unionists | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ethnic minorities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Some details about yourself:

Age: _____ Sex: Male Female

Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion? Yes No

How would you describe that religious tradition? Protestant Catholic Other

What do you consider your nationality to be _____ (*write in*).

| | <i>Strongly</i> | <i>Weakly</i> | <i>Not at all</i> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| How strongly do you feel yourself to be Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| How strongly do you feel yourself to be British | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| How strongly do you feel yourself to have an Ulster identity | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| How strongly do you feel yourself to be Northern Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Thank you for completing our questionnaire.
Have a great St Patrick's Day!