

Local charity celebrates 25 years of regeneration

Future plans for the regeneration of east Belfast

The power of working in partnership across east Belfast

SPECIAL EDITION

East Belfast **OBSERVER**

March 2022

INSIDE: Welcome to a Special Edition of the East Belfast Observer. The paper was originally published from May 2004 until June 2005 by EastSide Partnership, a local charity based in east Belfast. EastSide Partnership has produced this special edition to celebrate 25 years of regeneration in the area, to reflect on past achievements and to share plans for the future.

The Future

Chief Executive Michele Bryans on her aspirations for the future of EastSide Partnership.

“I am excited for the future and look forward to driving our organisation mission ‘to make east Belfast a better place.’”

Michele Bryans was appointed Chief Executive of EastSide Partnership in November 2021 and has overall responsibility for the management and strategic direction of the organisation. She is passionate about social regeneration and the positive impact of connecting people and place in order to sustain healthy and resilient communities.

Michele joined EastSide Partnership in June 2015 and previous roles include; EastSide Greenways Manager and Community Engagement and Volunteer Manager for Connswater Community Greenway. Before joining EastSide Partnership Michele worked in various youth and community roles in east Belfast since 2000.

Speaking about future plans for the organisation Michele said:

“We are proud to have been the key instigator of some very significant and major

regeneration opportunities right across east Belfast over the last 25 years and we look forward to continuing to make a difference in the local area.”

“There is a real buzz around EastSide at the minute and people across the city can see what an attractive and welcoming place it is. The Connswater Community Greenway has helped open up access to and within the east, creating a safe cycle and walking network. One of my main goals is to see it expand further; to link with the proposed Sydenham Greenway and to influence and advocate for the creation of a greenway network across the whole of Belfast.”

“The success of festivals and events in the area have also added to that and show that this is an area where people want to come and enjoy themselves.”

“Another key goal is to spur on regeneration and investment along the Newtownards Road.

Over the past few years there has been a lot of investment in the Hollywood Arches area of the Newtownards Road and going forward we want to focus on addressing dereliction along the rest of the Newtownards Road.”

“We are also looking forward to the extension of the EastSide Visitor Centre, which will see an expansion of the popular JACK Coffee Bar and a new C.S. Lewis experience.”

“Educational underachievement is another issue that has been prevalent here for years and we look forward to continuing to work with our various partners to improve this.”

Michele believes that the future holds a lot of promise for the area and that working closely with a range of funders, government departments, community organisations, political representatives, residents and businesses will be vital in order to help east Belfast grow.



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25 YEARS OF REGENERATION

East Belfast Observer

by Tony Wilson, EastSide Partnership

The first edition of the East Belfast Observer went on sale on Thursday 4th of March 2004, seeking to tap into the last remaining area of Belfast which didn't have its own dedicated local newspaper at that time.

To find out more about the history and legacy of the local newspaper we spoke to Tony Wilson, previous Business Editor of the East Belfast Observer and Company Accountant at EastSide Partnership: "The East Belfast Observer was the brainchild of our former Chief Executive Maurice Kinkead, who along with the newspaper's Chairman and local business owner James Brown, was successful in applying for £250k of seed funding from the EU Peace 2 programme. A team of 7 full-time staff was then assembled and worked from Bloomfield House, the former Irvine's shoe shop located at the junction of Bloomfield Avenue and Newtownards Road." The editorial staff delivered a weekly newspaper, costing 50p, which was rich in local community news and sports stories. Although initial sales of the newspaper were strong, the reality was that the paper could not breach the threshold of weekly sales in order to allow it to breakeven, especially in the face of strong competition for advertising revenue from the established daily newspaper titles. The short life story of the East Belfast Observer ended with the last edition of the newspaper being published on Thursday 16th June 2005. Commenting on the legacy of the East Belfast Observer Tony said: "The ultimate success of the project should be measured by the opportunities afforded to several aspiring local journalists who have subsequently gone on to have successful journalistic careers both in Northern Ireland and beyond these shores."



What does EastSide Partnership do?

EastSide Partnership is a local charity leading the regeneration of east Belfast. Working alongside other community-based organisations, elected representatives, statutory agencies and local businesses, EastSide Partnership delivers a wide variety of projects with a clear mission to 'make east Belfast a better place' for residents, businesses and visitors.

EastSide Partnership aims to:

- Create an east Belfast that is a thriving cultural hub, where the arts are valued, creativity is for everyone and people are connected with each other and the wider world through **EastSide Arts**
- Promote the use and development of green open spaces, parks, rivers and off-road transport routes in east Belfast through **EastSide Greenways including Connswater Community Greenway**
- Help and support children in east Belfast to develop their abilities, reach their potential and experience success, whatever their background through **EastSide Learning**
- Contribute to the regeneration of east Belfast through the strategic acquisition, development and management of sites and properties through **EastSide Property**
- Coordinate and deliver responsible, sustainable and impactful culture-led regeneration, pushing boundaries to put east Belfast on the map through **EastSide Tourism**
- Raise awareness and help alleviate the impact of poverty in inner east Belfast through the **Scaffolding Project**



"There's a growing sense of community here now, with artists collaborating or even just socialising, sharing contacts."

Creative East

by Anthony Toner, Songwriter

"I had no idea what to expect when I moved to east Belfast," says Coleraine-born and bred songwriter Anthony Toner, who has called Sydenham his home for the last ten years.

"My wife Andrea and I wanted to move to Belfast, but at first we had no idea which part. And then a friend of ours offered us a small house in Sydenham to rent, and we thought we would give it a go." The move was a success, and within a couple of years, the couple had left the rental house, bought a larger property round the corner - and settled into life in the east.

Since then, he has continued to play concerts and release albums (his most recent collection, Six Inches of Water celebrates characters and places from the east, and includes the memorable title track, inspired by the old Corporation Baths on Templemore Avenue), and he and his wife, theatre director and playwright Andrea Montgomery of Terra Nova Productions, have become part of the creative community that loves this part of town.

"We know we're 'blow-ins', but we've come to consider it 'our' part of the city,"

he adds. "We honestly can't think of anywhere else in Belfast we'd prefer to live. In the last decade, the development of the Greenway network, C.S. Lewis Square and the refurbishment of Victoria Park has added a huge amount to our quality of life. Especially during Lockdown - the ability to get out and walk and cycle in a beautiful space was an absolute lifeline."

There's also a sense that the area is increasingly becoming a haven for artists, he adds: "The success of the annual EastSide Arts Festival and the C.S. Lewis Festival (along with Woodstock Blues Festival), which take place every year, have established themselves as vital parts of the calendar year now. And of course, the work being done by EastSide Arts, The Vault, Queen Street Studios... by the various independent events promoters, publishers, food companies, breweries... it's a very exciting time to be living here.

"Every time you look around there's another new venue, a new artists' collective, new artisan food offerings, a new restaurant - or just some other individual artist who has moved into the area. There's a growing sense of community here now, with artists collaborating or even just socialising, sharing contacts."

Like most of those artists, Anthony and Andrea are just closing the door on a baffling and challenging year: "It will take a long time to get back to the way it was before for live music, for audiences as well as venues, artists and promoters. And there's a strong chance it will never be the same. But I believe the only response for anyone in the creative community is... to keep creating, and to innovate and think of new ways to connect to audiences, so I refuse to despair - there's too much work to be done."

Celebrating 25 Years

Over the past 25 years EastSide Partnership has developed and delivered a range of innovative regeneration projects in east Belfast across arts, education, greenways, health, community, heritage and tourism.

The establishment of the annual EastSide Arts Festival, the development of the Connswater Community Greenway and the building of a new GP surgery at Bridges Family Practice are just some of the projects that have made a positive impact on the lives of people in the local community.

Across the page you will see images of some of the other projects we have delivered from commissioning public art, like The Searcher statue at Holywood Arches, to organising learning events for families, like the EastSide Learning Reading Fair which took place in Skainos.

These achievements and our longevity as an organisation would not be possible without the commitment of our board members, staff, volunteers, partners and funders who believe in the work we undertake; thank you all for your support and for sharing our vision for the future.

We look forward to celebrating many more milestones. In the meantime we remain committed to improving the lives of people living locally and will deliver our work in line with our adopted core values including; alleviating poverty and disadvantage, being entrepreneurial, seeking economic sustainability as an organisation, being environmentally responsible, respecting and celebrating local heritage, being inclusive and working collaboratively.



The Searcher statue, unveiled 1998



EastSide Halloween Carnival, 2021



Van Morrison, Live on Cyprus Avenue, 2015



EastSide Visitor Centre, opened August 2016



Reading Fair, 2016



Sam Thompson Bridge, opened 2014



Bridges Family Practice, officially opened June 2016

Insight from the Board

by Michael Briggs

We chatted to Michael Briggs, Executive Director of East Belfast Community Development Agency about his membership of EastSide Partnership board and the work of his organisation in developing east Belfast.



How are you involved with EastSide Partnership?

I became a member of the EastSide Partnership board in 1999, back then it was called the Greater East Belfast Partnership and subsequently East Belfast Partnership. Since then I have served on a number of internal boards and committees including the East Belfast Publishing board who were responsible for the East Belfast Observer. Currently I am Chair of both the Inner East Neighbourhood Partnership and EastSide Partnership Audit & Risk Committee.

What has been a key moment for you in the 25 year history of EastSide Partnership?

From our organisation's perspective it is great to look back on the community engagement we undertook on behalf of EastSide Partnership in 2007 in relation to the Connswater Community Greenway. The Greenway was, back then, a set of drawings, merely a concept, and it is amazing to see that this came to life and is a fantastic asset for the community.

From a personal perspective I really enjoyed participating in the EastSide Lives heritage project in 2020. I was one of a number of local people who learned new heritage related

skills and researched ordinary people from east Belfast's past, in my case I researched my Grandfather Joe Caldwell. Research from this work resulted in a heritage trail featuring these local people with each point on the trail marked with a piece of wall art and an interpretive panel which you can see dotted around east Belfast.

Tell us more about the work of East Belfast Community Development Agency.

In 2020 East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBCDA) celebrated 50 years of supporting the community sector in east Belfast. The organisation exists to provide resources, support and capacity building programmes for community groups. Our job is to add value to the activity undertaken by groups in local areas and to work with key organisations to ensure the continued development of a community sector in east Belfast that is recognised, valued and effective. We seek to support successful community development and promote cooperation and locally based solutions.

Our programmes include Community Support which involves co-ordinating local networks, supporting partnership work and promoting best practice and Health Development and Connections which

involves building capacity of local people to improve health and wellbeing and supporting connections and relationships that will bring health issues to the fore.

People can find out more about our work on the website www.ebcda.org or Facebook.

How have East Belfast Community Development Agency and EastSide Partnership worked together to improve the lives of local people?

With 75 years' experience between the two organisations we are well placed to continue to make a positive impact on east Belfast through our individual work but also through our partnership and collaborative working. We have worked together on a wide variety of projects and programmes over the years, from holding weekly walking groups along the Connswater Community Greenway, and leadership development programmes, to providing cookery demonstrations to upskill local people and encourage healthier lives.

We also work together to advocate for east Belfast on issues related to Neighbourhood Renewal, poverty, education and encourage engagement from east Belfast on the wider plans being developed for the city of Belfast. We look forward to continuing to work with EastSide Partnership on future projects in the coming years.

Our Community

by Jack Harrison, Bloomfield Community Association

We chatted to Jack Harrison about his experience of volunteering in east Belfast and his journey to employment at Bloomfield Community Association.

Can you tell us about your journey from volunteering to working at Bloomfield Community Association?

I began volunteering with EastSide Greenways (part of EastSide Partnership) back in 2015 when Michele Bryans (EastSide Partnership) and Karen Purdy (Bloomfield Community Association) started engaging with a group of young people, including me, in Orangefield Park.

The group met for several years and in that time we were provided with lots of opportunities to participate in various activities which helped us gain skills to progress into adulthood. After a few years volunteering at events along the Greenway, I then started volunteering at Bloomfield Community Association's summer scheme. During this time I realised I had a passion for working with children which led me to gain a qualification and then I began working at Bloomfield.

What impact, if any, do you think volunteering with EastSide Partnership had on your journey?

Volunteering with EastSide Partnership really helped me to appreciate and want to do something positive for my community, not just within my own community but the broader east Belfast area. It gave me lots of confidence and helped me to enhance my skill set. Volunteering also helped me to improve my social skills by being able to meet lots of new people and make lifelong friendships.

What is your favourite memory of volunteering with EastSide Partnership?

My favourite EastSide Partnership volunteering memory has got to be the annual C.S. Lewis Square Christmas Light switch on – it brings lots of happiness and joy, especially for the children getting to meet Mr & Mrs Claus. It is always great to go to and certainly helps everyone get into the festive spirit – also nice to grab a hot chocolate too!

What projects within EastSide Partnership have you worked with? and what variety of opportunities did they offer?

I have mostly volunteered with Eastside Greenways, however, I have also attended various events organised by both EastSide Learning and EastSide Arts. One of my favourite events was the street art class with local artist Emic; it was amazing. We all got the chance to make our own artwork, and as a group we all helped spray paint a hummingbird – the final piece looked fantastic! I also recently really enjoyed reading to our playgroup at the launch of the 'Anna and Rory Explore the Greenway' book, organised by EastSide Learning and EastSide Greenways.



The Importance of Partnership

by Maggie Andrews, EastSide Partnership

“Our strong partnerships, established over many years, have demonstrated how we can do things better together...”



“We hope that we have built a reputation for high quality delivery; whether that is a large or small capital project ...”

Maggie has worked at EastSide Partnership since 2002, first as Partnership Manager and now as EastSide Learning Manager. We asked her to reflect on the importance of partnership working and strong working relationships over the past 25 years.

“When we consider the successes of the last 25 years at EastSide Partnership, we reflect on the vast numbers of people who have committed their skills and energy to make the work happen – not least our dedicated Board members who have guided our decision making.”

“Of course, nothing would have been possible without funding. Every project you read about in this paper has happened because we were able to convince funders that it would be a worthwhile investment. Our strong partnerships, established over many years, have demonstrated how we can

do things better together; establishing coalitions of interest to take a strategic overview of what is needed and elevating our ambition to deliver more than we set out to on many occasions – not least the story of the Connswater Community Greenway.”

“We hope that we have built a reputation for high quality delivery; whether that is a large or small capital project with high visibility, to a programme addressing some of the challenges faced by local communities which happens under the radar.”

“There is no doubt that the challenges keep emerging and we intend to continue building those important relationships with individuals, community and voluntary organisations and those with money to invest in east Belfast, to help it be an even better place to live and work.”

Volunteers

by Heather Chesney, EastSide Partnership

EastSide Partnership recognises volunteers as a core part of our team. Without the continued support of a dedicated team of volunteers, we would be unable to deliver the range of events and activities we currently do. Volunteers are, therefore, critical to delivery of change in east Belfast.

Volunteering is a great way to share your enthusiasm, skills and ideas whilst having fun and meeting likeminded people. We strive to provide as many opportunities to volunteer as possible throughout the year and are always keen to welcome new volunteers to the team.

By volunteering with EastSide Partnership you can make a positive contribution to your community, showcasing east Belfast locally, nationally and internationally to visitors and helping to deliver real change that will benefit the whole of the city. We have a range of volunteer roles to get involved with such as marshalling, ticketing, arts and craft workshops, tour guiding, greeting visitors, cycle leaders, setting up equipment for events and workshops, community clean-ups etc.

Here are what some of our volunteers have to say about the experience:

Erin Neill:

“I began volunteering at the beginning of my year out from university. Being away from studying, I was at a wee bit of a loose end and so I decided to begin volunteering with EastSide Partnership because I saw the vital difference they have made within east Belfast, engaging with local community groups, hosting event and keeping our green spaces safe and welcoming.

I think that volunteering is one of the best ways to spend your spare time, especially when it directly benefits your local community and the people living and working in your area.

Since I began volunteering with EastSide I have taken part in litter picking sessions from C.S. Lewis Square to Victoria Park, been part of the set-up crew for events, contributed a video for the C.S. Lewis Festival and completed the World Host Ambassador Training... there's something for everyone!”

Mildred Bell:

“I have been volunteering with EastSide Partnership for a number of years since I retired and gained a bit of spare time. I really wanted to give something back to the community, but as with most volunteering activities I think I have gained more than I have given.

Apart from some litter picking I have been mainly involved in the EastSide Arts Festival. I have loved being involved in the range of events from music, drama, fun in the park, bus and walking tours.

While volunteering I have been able to enjoy the events and hopefully help the attendees enjoy themselves but most of all I have made many friends and have enjoyed the craic.”

To find out more about volunteering please visit www.eastsidepartnership.com/volunteer or call 028 9045 1900



Volunteers at C.S. Lewis Square



Volunteers at Orangefield Park

A Special Mention

Maurice Kinkead has been synonymous with EastSide Partnership for the past 25 years having been Chief Executive since August 1996 until his retirement in November 2021.

Maurice led the organisation for 25 years with passion and we want to thank him for his vision, leadership and entrepreneurship which have, through the work of EastSide Partnership, changed the landscape of east Belfast.



Maurice Kinkead

Future Plans

With a quarter of a century foundation in place **EastSide Partnership** is looking forward to the future and building on key successes through its wide variety of projects.

EastSide Partnership will focus on:

- Developing arts and creativity by delivering festivals, open access programmes and targeted engagement projects through EastSide Arts. Look out for the Big Kids' Society, a monthly creative pop up night across various venues in east Belfast where people can get creative, whilst having a laugh
- Enhancing and conserving the environment along the **Connswater Community Greenway** and ensuring its sustainability as a living landmark. Building on the **EastSide Greenways** concept plan and brand, we will promote the potential for and facilitate the delivery of a wider 'EastSide Greenways' network
- Contributing to the regeneration of east Belfast by developing key properties including the upcoming extension of EastSide Visitor Centre by **EastSide Property**
- Helping and supporting children in east Belfast through **EastSide Learning** to develop their abilities; reach their potential and experience success; whatever their background. EastSide Learning is planning to work with schools and community partners in the coming months to ensure children in east Belfast will benefit from the implementation of the Department of Education's Reducing Educational Disadvantage programme
- Championing the principles of regenerative tourism to ensure the positive economic, environmental and societal impact of tourism is maximised at a local level across the city. Through **EastSide Tourism** we will further develop EastSide's burgeoning Neighbourhood Tourism offering and continue to empower local ambassadors to proudly celebrate east Belfast's rich cultural tapestry and modern-day personality
- Raising awareness and helping alleviate the impact of poverty in Inner East Belfast through the **Scaffolding Project**. The Scaffolding Project recently published a Briefing Document about 'the experience of poverty and community responses in east Belfast'. The report is a reflection of what is happening in the community regarding the issue of poverty and provides recommendations on how causes might be addressed which will be a focus for future work in advocating for change.



Get in Touch

There are a number of ways in which you can get in touch with EastSide Partnership:

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Belfast BT4 1HE

Email: info@eastsidepartnership.com

To keep up to date with the latest news you can subscribe to the mailing list on the website - www.eastsidepartnership.com or get in touch in any other way and we will be happy to provide more information.

EastSide Arts

www.eastsidearts.net
Facebook: /EastSideArtsBel
Twitter @ EastSideArtsBel
Instagram @EastSideArtsBel

EastSide Greenways/ Connswater Community Greenway

www.connswatergreenway.co.uk
Facebook:
/connswatercommunitygreenway
Facebook: /CSLewisSquare
Twitter @ConnsGreenway
Instagram @connswater_greenway

EastSide Learning

www.eastsidelearning.co.uk
Facebook: /EastsidelearningBelfast
Twitter @EastSide_Learn

EastSide Visitor Centre/ EastSide Tourism

www.VisitEastSide.com
Facebook: /EastSideVC
Twitter @EastSideVC

George Best House

www.GeorgeBestHouse.com
Facebook: /GeorgeBestHouse

C.S. Lewis Festival

Facebook: /CSLewisFestival
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