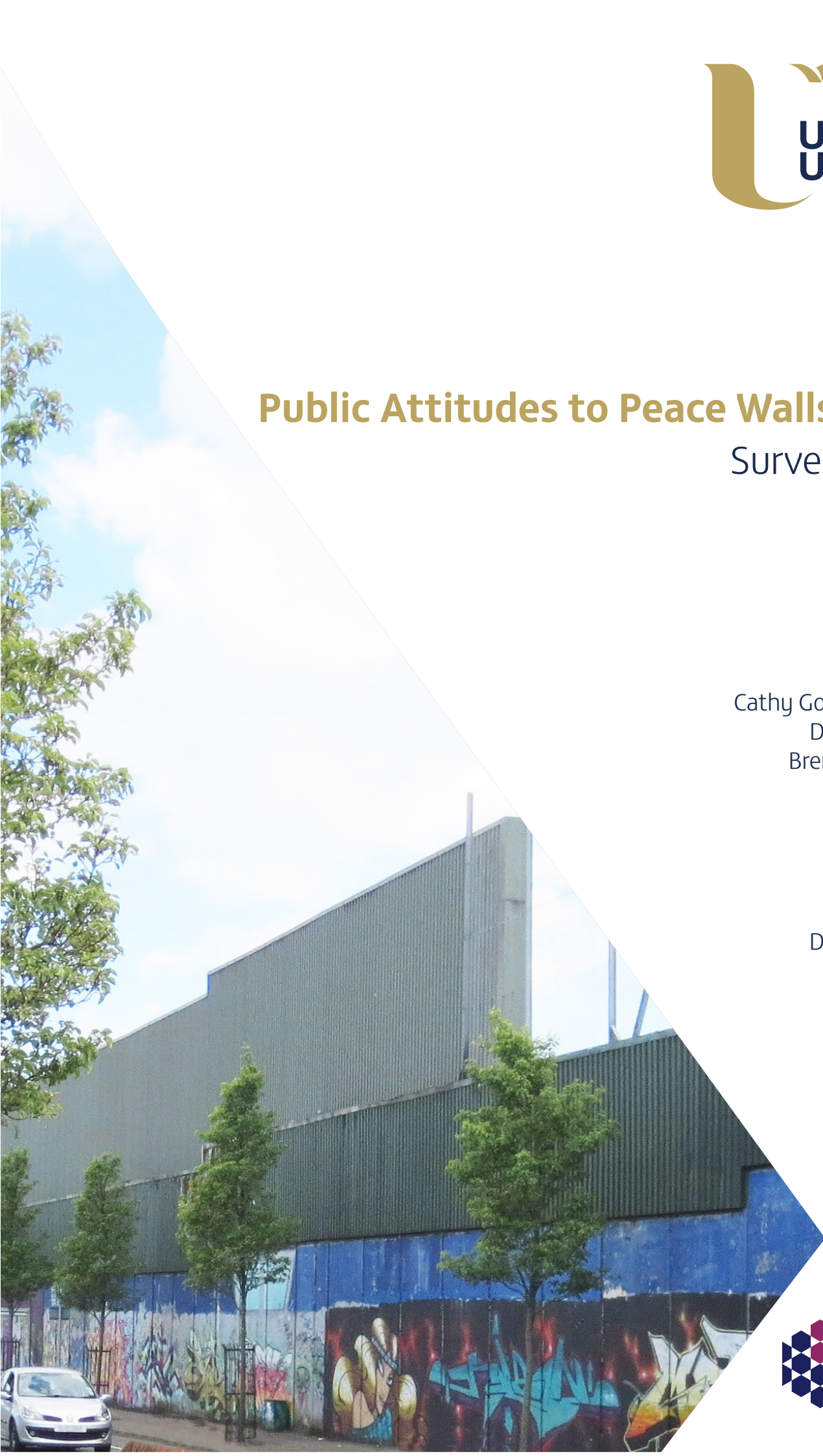


# Public Attitudes to Peace Walls (2015)

## Survey Results

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# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	3
<b>2. Methodology</b>	5
2.1 Survey content	5
2.2 Sampling design	5
2.3 Survey implementation	8
2.4 Response rates	8
2.5 Data preparation	8
2.6 Weighting the data	8
2.7 Demographics of the sample	8
2.8 Tables in this report	9
<b>3. Overall Survey Results</b>	10
3.1 Length of time resident has lived in their property	10
3.2 Relations with the 'other' community	12
3.3 Function of the peace wall	15
3.4 Knowledge and understanding of policy	17
3.5 Roles and responsibilities in relation to peace walls	17
3.6 Imagining the future	21
3.7 Comparison with the 2012 survey	25
<b>4. Key Findings</b>	28
4.1 Views and attitudes of residents	28
4.2 Views and attitudes of residents by religion	30
4.3 Comparisons between surveys – 2012 and 2015	31
<b>5. Concluding Remarks</b>	33
<b>6. References</b>	35

# 1. Introduction

This report explores the current attitudes of residents living beside peace walls in Northern Ireland in the context of the Northern Ireland Executive's *'Together: Building a United Community'* (TBUC) strategy, published in May 2013, which set itself a target of removing all interface barriers (peace walls) by 2023.

With funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), our research team considered the broader issues of peace walls and public policy in Northern Ireland over a 12-month period, concluding September 2015. The research team worked in partnership with the Department of Justice who are leading the programme to deliver the TBUC target of removing all interface barriers by 2023. This included a number of discrete quantitative and qualitative research reports and several focused workshops designed to allow key stakeholders inside and beyond the Department to reflect on the requirements for delivery and to bring to light critical issues influencing the policy outcome. This report on public attitudes towards peace walls forms one part of the year-long knowledge-exchange engagement.

The persistence of segregation and separation in Northern Ireland has left significant challenges for policy makers. The majority of children are still educated in religiously separated schools and the majority of people in social housing still live in divided communities (Nolan, 2014). This polarisation is most clearly visible if viewed from the hills surrounding Belfast, with sections of the city physically divided by high walls, metal barriers and concrete blocks. Communities are also kept apart in less obvious ways, where motorways, shopping centres, dense foliage and/or vacant and derelict landscapes have been used to define the perimeters of particular communities. This 'conflict related architecture' serves as a physical reminder that the problems of hostility and fear in Northern Ireland have not yet disappeared.

Defining what is meant by the term 'Peace Wall' remains complicated and divisive. The term is poorly delineated and often contested, and is sometimes used interchangeably with similar, but equally complicated labels (peace lines; interfaces; contested spaces). No single definition is likely to satisfy every agency and commentator, but it is important to specify what the term represents in the context of this study. Our first survey of public attitudes towards peace walls was conducted in 2012, with funding from the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) (Byrne et al., 2013), in that survey respondents were informed that: *'We are using the term Peace Wall to cover all kinds of physical interface barriers that keep communities apart – including walls, gates and security barriers'*. The same definition was used in the 2015 survey.

In 2012, the largest group among all respondents believed that the peace walls should come down at some time in the future (58%), while a smaller proportion thought that the peace walls should come down immediately (14%). At the same time, over a fifth of respondents living closest to the peace walls (22%) thought that they should stay as they are.

These attitudes were underpinned by expressed fears of potential 'loss' of community; a fear of violence; and a fear that the police would be unable to maintain law and order in the event of the

‘constant problems’ that might result from the walls being removed. Indeed, 17% of respondents living closest to the walls said that they would try to move away if the walls in their areas were to come down. Greater use of CCTV and a stronger police presence were viewed by respondents as the most appropriate response to any change in the conflict architecture where they lived.

The removal of the peace walls has been widely understood as the ultimate symbolic act of reconciliation between two communities who have traditionally prioritised separation over sharing. But perhaps the most uncomfortable result of the 2012 survey was that 69% of those living closest to the walls believed that the walls must remain (for now) because of the potential for violence (Gormley-Heenan et al, 2013). Almost two decades after the paramilitary ceasefires, walls were still seen as a necessary protection from violence emanating from ‘the other’ community.

The purpose of this new survey, conducted in mid-2015, has been to ascertain and understand whether public attitudes to the removal of peace walls had changed in any way over the last 3 years.

Since the last survey, much has happened in the political and policy arenas. Extensive loyalist protests against the December 2012 decision of Belfast City Council to fly the Union flag from Belfast City Hall on designated days and the continuing dispute over parading at Ardoyne/Twaddell since July 2013 led to a measurable hardening of attitudes towards reconciliation and cross-community relationships on all sides, but particularly within loyalist communities.

In addition, interface areas remain characterised by social deprivation, which has almost certainly deepened in the difficult economic climate since 2008. The desire for change in interface areas whether through plans to remove peace walls or to reimage interface areas through public investment has not been matched by the scale of public funding available to actualise the changes needed.

Against this political and economic backdrop, government policy also changed. Among the various targets and objectives identified within the Together: Building a United Community (TBUC) strategy, was the target of removing ALL interface barriers (peace walls) by 2023. The key principles underpinning this intervention were that: local communities should come together to produce a phased plan of how to reduce and eventually remove the barrier; maximum consensus should be achieved from both sides of the wall/barrier; personal and property safety are core issues and considerations for the plan; and departments and agencies would need to give priority to consideration of plans. Community engagement in the process was regarded by the Executive as critical: *‘Taking down interface barriers is not something that can be achieved without engagement with, consent and support of the people who live there. We must be sensitive to the views and perceptions of residents and balance this against the responsibility on us to create the conditions within which division and segregation can become resigned to the past’* (TBUC, 2013).

It is in this political, economic and policy context that the results of the 2015 attitudinal survey on peace walls must be considered.



## 2. Methodology

The research project received ethical approval from the Ethics Filter Committee in the School of Criminology, Politics and Social Policy at Ulster University in March 2015. The survey was funded by the Department of Justice (DoJ) and, following a competitive tendering exercise, Perceptive Insight was appointed to undertake the fieldwork.

The 2015 attitudinal study was undertaken through a postal survey, which was sent to 4,000 households and was completed by 1,021 people who lived in closest proximity to the peace walls in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, and Portadown/Lurgan. A total of 389 surveys were returned after the postal dispatch, representing an initial response of 10%. A further 632 people completed and returned the questionnaire following a face-to-face reminder call by Perceptive Insight interviewers, which boosted the overall response rate to 27%.

When considering these figures, three key distinctions between the 2012 and 2015 surveys should be noted:

- 1)** In 2012, the primary research took the form of two distinct and separate postal surveys: the first was administered to a cross-section of residents situated on, or within a short distance from, a peace wall in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry; while the second was administered to a cross-section of the general population. The 2015 survey did not target a cross section of the general population and focused on the first cohort only.
- 2)** In addition to surveying the residents from Belfast and Derry/Londonderry, the 2015 survey targeted some neighbourhoods in Lurgan/Portadown.
- 3)** In the 2012 survey, a £10 incentive voucher was offered to those who participated in the research by submitting a completed postal survey. In 2015 no such incentive was offered to respondents.

### 2.1 Survey content

The questionnaire explored the following themes:

- Proximity to a peace wall and opinions on the area as a place to live;
- Interactions with other communities;
- Perceptions of the function of peace walls;
- Awareness of various related policy initiatives;
- Roles and responsibilities in relation to peace walls;
- Views on methods of transforming and removing peace walls;
- Perceptions of the impact of removing peace walls.

### 2.2 Sampling design

The sampling frame for the survey was all adults aged 18 or over who live in the neighbourhoods adjacent to peace walls in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and in Lurgan/Portadown.

The sampling took place in a number of stages. Stage 1: Defining Peace Wall areas - the approach to sampling in the 2012 study enabled the identification of streets within peace wall areas in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Subsequently, this same sampling frame formed the basis of the 2015 study, with the same approach used to identify additional streets adjacent to peace walls locations in the Portadown and Lurgan areas. In doing this, the following steps were taken:

- Perceptive Insight and Ulster University reviewed ordnance survey maps, firstly to define the areas that are regarded as North, West and East Belfast, secondly to identify peace walls within these areas and thirdly to identify the streets that are located in close proximity to each peace wall;
- When selecting the streets, an account was taken of main thoroughfares that act as boundaries within a defined area. The publication, *Belfast Interfaces; Security Barriers and Defensive Use of Space* (Jarman, 2012) was used for reference during this process;
- The approach to the selection of addresses was similar in the Derry/Londonderry and Craigavon (Lurgan/Portadown) Boroughs. In 2012, this involved liaising with community representatives in Derry/Londonderry to review the streets that were selected for the study to ensure that it was comprehensive;
- In addition to the 13 areas identified in the 2012 study, a further 5 areas were identified in the Craigavon Borough for inclusion in the 2015 study. The location of all identified Peace Wall areas are included in Table 1.

**Table 1: Peace Wall locations and sub areas**

Location	Sub area
North Belfast	Hazelwood Whitewell Ligoneil Ardoyne/Glenbryn Old Park/Cliftonville Tigers Bay/New Lodge
West Belfast	Upper Springfield Falls/Shankill Suffolk/Lenadoon
East Belfast	Short Strand/Inner East
Derry/Londonderry	Fountain/Bishop St. Tullyvalley/Curnnerian Top of Hill/Irish Street
Lurgan/Portadown	Charles St/Charles Park Corcrain Road/Craigwell Avenue Obins Avenue Curran St/Northway Margretta Park (Lurgan)

Stage 2 of the design process involved identifying the population of addresses. A postcode was assigned to each identified peace wall area street. The postcodes were then matched to each residential address within the Pointer database that had the same postcode thus providing the population of households from which to draw the sample. A random sample of these addresses, stratified by peace wall location, were chosen to take part in the survey so as to allow sufficient numbers for sub-group analysis.

Table 2: Response rates

Location	Sub area	Population of households	No. mailed out	Unusable addresses	Number returned	Response rate
North Belfast	Hazelwood	34	6	0	2	32%
	Whitewell	298	55	0	17	31%
	Ligoneil	324	60	0	16	27%
	Ardoyne/Glenbryn	2,827	525	7	134	26%
	Old Park/Cliftonville	1,140	212	9	55	27%
	Tigers Bay/New Lodge	1,839	342	36	85	28%
	<b>Sub total</b>	<b>6,462</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>27%</b>
East Belfast	Short Strand – Inner East	1,266	600	9	152	26%
	<b>Sub total</b>	<b>1,266</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>26%</b>
West Belfast	Upper Springfield	1,368	277	7	70	26%
	Falls – Shankill	3,298	669	44	173	28%
	Suffolk – Lenadoon	2,236	454	9	109	25%
	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>6,902</b>	<b>1400</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>26%</b>
L. Derry	Fountain – Bishop St.	435	151	18	40	30%
	Tullyvalley – Currnerian	389	135	0	37	27%
	Top of Hill – Irish Street	325	113	2	29	26%
	<b>Sub total</b>	<b>1,149</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>28%</b>
Lurgan/ Portadown	Charles St. – Charles Pk.	48	20	1	5	26%
	Corcrair Road - Craigwell Avenue	174	72	2	19	27%
	Obins Avenue	275	114	1	31	27%
	Curran St. – Northway	347	144	5	32	23%
	Margretta Pk. (Lurgan)	121	50	0	15	30%
	<b>Sub total</b>	<b>965</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>All</b>		<b>16,744</b>	<b>4000</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>1,021</b>	<b>27%</b>



## 2.3 Survey implementation

A total of 4,000 households were selected for participation in the study. A questionnaire was sent to each address by post. A cover letter accompanied the questionnaire, which explained the rationale for the study and requested participation. The first mail out took place on 23 March 2015. Responses were monitored and face-to-face reminder calls were implemented from the 13 April 2015. The closing date (for both postal and returns due to face-to-face reminders) was set for 24 April 2015, but all the questionnaires that were returned by 1 May 2015 were included in the data set.

## 2.4 Response rates

Table 2 details the total number of households in each of the peace wall locations and sub-areas, the number of addresses selected for the survey, the number of unusable addresses (returned by Royal Mail as undeliverable), the number of completed questionnaires that were returned, and the response rates.

## 2.5 Data preparation

The data from the self-completion questionnaires was input using the statistics software package Snap and exported into SPSS prior to analysis. All data was subject to an extensive range of inter and intra variable logic checks.

## 2.6 Weighting the data

Weighting was applied to the data file to take account of sample design effects (which occur due to selecting participants based on households and stratifying the sample by peace wall location). When applied, this weighting simultaneously accounted for two effects:

- Weight 1 should be applied to the dataset to take account of disproportionate household size;
- Weight 2 should be applied to take account of the stratified sampling by peace wall location.

## 2.7 Demographics of the sample

As in 2012, more Catholics than Protestants participated in the study (Catholic respondents – 56% in 2012, 59% in 2015; Protestant respondents – 36% in 2012, 32% in 2015). This disparity in responses may be explained by research which shows interface areas in Belfast have been increasingly populated by individuals from a Nationalist background (Murtagh and Shirlow, 2006). A majority have lived in their homes for more than 15 years (54%) with a total of 76% living near a peace wall for 6 or more years.

Table 3: Demographics of the sample

		Residents (%)
<b>Sex</b>	Male	45
	Female	54
	No reply	2
<b>Age</b>	18-24	9
	25-34	15
	35-44	14
	45-54	20
	55-64	18
	65 or older	22
	No reply	2
<b>Religion</b>	Protestant	32
	Catholic	59
	Other	1
	No religion	6

## 2.8 Tables in this report

This report builds on the first descriptive analysis of data of this kind that took place in the 2012 edition of this survey. The results have also been broken down by religion, in keeping with the 2012 report. All tables have been calculated with the combined Weight1 and Weight2 applied. Due to the effects of rounding columns totals do not always sum to exactly 100%. As the 2015 edition of the survey does not include findings from the general public, comparisons with the 2012 data refers to 'residents' responses gathered from that survey only, rather than the total sample.

## 3. Overall Survey Results

The following section sets out the survey results using a series of themed headings. In addition to the issues covered in the 2012 survey, participants were also asked to consider the term ‘community consent’ and reflect on what this term meant. In a related set of questions, respondents were also asked to reflect on their interactions with the community that resided on ‘the other side’ of their nearest peace wall.

### 3.1 Length of time resident has lived in their property and opinions on the area as a place to live

To allow us to understand some of the context, respondents were asked to indicate how long they lived at their current address. Table 4 indicates that the majority of respondents (54%) have lived in their property for ‘more than 15 years’. This supports evidence from the 2012 survey that indicated that people living in interface areas are mostly long-term residents (59% of respondents in 2012 indicated that they had lived in their property for more than 10 years) and survey responses are therefore based on extensive ‘lived experience’ of life beside a peace wall, including times of conflict and of relative calm.

Table 4: How long have you lived at this property?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Less than 1 year	7	6	7
1 to 5 years	17	21	14
6 to 10 years	10	11	8
More than 10 years	12	14	13
More than 15 years	54	48	58

When asked about the quality of life in their community, 24% of Catholics and 31% of Protestants emphasised the strong sense of solidarity (Table 5). This finding was consistent among people of all ages and true for both men and women. However, more Catholics (23%) than Protestants (11%) believed that their area was a good place to bring up children. It is worth noting that younger adults (13%) were over twice as likely as people over 35 (6%) to emphasise positive social networks.

Table 5: What is the main strength of this community? (by religion)

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Positive social networks	8	8	8
Strong sense of solidarity	25	31	24
Good place to bring up children	18	11	23
Reassuring sense of safety	8	9	8
Good access to facilities	21	23	21
Useful transport links	19	18	17

Residents were asked about the impact of the peace process on their neighbourhood. Over a third of all those responding to the survey (35%) believed that there had been no local benefits from the peace process (Table 6). This was particularly true among Protestants (52%) although also evident among Catholic respondents (25%). Almost no-one responding to our survey believed that there had been any economic benefit from the peace process. Among Catholics, only 3% reported an improvement in economic conditions, while only 1% of Protestants noted the same. Although those between 18 and 34 were marginally more likely (5%) to report positive economic change than those older than 35 (3%), this is a startling outcome 17 years after the Good Friday Agreement.

Where positive change was observed, it was largely a question of improved safety (21%) and peacefulness (33%). In each case, more Catholics than Protestants reported benefits.

Table 6: How has your area benefited from the peace process? (by religion)

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Improved economic conditions	3	1	3
More peaceful surroundings	33	25	38
Increased sense of safety	21	15	24
Improved health and wellbeing	2	2	2
Environmental improvements	6	5	7
There have been no benefits	35	52	25

What the survey cannot tell us, however, is whether the perceived absence of economic improvement is the result of the continued existence of peace walls, or whether the absence of progress on removing peace walls itself results from the absence of any economic feel-good factor. In the current context, where the success of TBUC in this area is contingent on local consent for change, a clear understanding of the consequences for local wellbeing, including economic, social, security, educational and environmental benefits will be critical.

Attitudes towards safety are also important to understand. Although only 21% of respondents reported an improved sense of safety as a result of the peace process, three quarters of all respondents to the survey reported that their communities were very or fairly safe (Table 7). There was, however, a difference between Protestants and Catholics with notably more Catholics (32%) than Protestants (24%) feeling very safe, while many more Protestants (16%) than Catholics (5%) said they felt very or fairly unsafe.

Table 7: How safe do you feel in your community? (by religion)

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Very safe	28	24	32
Fairly safe	48	45	50
Neither safe nor unsafe	12	15	11
Fairly unsafe	6	11	3
Very unsafe	3	5	2
Don't know/not sure	2	1	2

Previous research has shown that safety and security are two issues (Byrne, et al 2012) that influence how local residents view processes to remove peace walls. Those that reside closest to the walls want to be assured that their homes and families will not be at risk and that in the absence of a barrier, they will remain safe and not vulnerable. However, the 2014 NI Peace Monitoring report noted that sectarian violence was problematic and that 'in working class communities: paramilitaries are still very much part of today's reality' (Nolan, 2014). Furthermore, the recent announcement from the PSNI Chief Constable, that cuts to the PSNI would 'fundamentally change how and where policing is delivered' (NIPB, 2014), could have unpredictable effects on community confidence in the capacity of alternative policing structures to reduce and respond to community fears around safety in the absence of the peace walls.

### 3.2 Relations with 'the other' community

Social separation on the basis of community background remains considerable (Table 8). Over a fifth of both Catholics and Protestants reported that they never meet people from outside their own community. The general pattern of inter-community contact is very similar in both communities. What is clear, however, is that interaction is less unusual among people under 55, with 51% of adults under 35 reporting that they interacted often or very often contrasting with 38% among respondents over 55. Whereas 55% of women interacted often with people who did not share their own community background, this was true for 43% of men.

Table 8: Generally speaking, how often do you interact with people outside of your own community background? (By gender)

	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Very often	30	29	30
Often	20	14	25
Occasionally	18	23	14
Rarely	12	12	12
Never	20	22	19

In terms of religion, the pattern of contact with people outside the community was generally similar for both Catholics and Protestants (Table 9). However, Catholics (82%) were somewhat more likely to regard this contact in a positive light than Protestants (71%). Women (83%) were more likely than men (74%) to experience contact as mostly or always positive, and this was also true of people under 35 (83%) compared with those over 55 (75%). The inclusion of women and younger people in community leadership may be an important factor in shaping wider community attitudes.

Table 9: Is interaction with other communities positive or negative? (by religion)

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Always positive	38	37	37
Mostly positive	41	34	45
Neither positive or negative	18	25	14
Mostly negative	3	5	3
Always negative	0	0	0

While there was some evidence of engagement with others in general, there was much less evidence of contact with people on the other side of a physical structure at neighbourhood level (Table 10a). In total, 22% of all respondents reported that they interacted very often or often, whereas 42% reported that they had no contact across their nearest peace wall. Interestingly, Catholics (20%) were less likely to have regular interaction than Protestants (22%). Although women were marginally more likely to have regular interaction than men, the variation in interaction was much greater when broken down by age (Table 10b). Whereas 15% of the over 55s responding to the survey reported that they often or very often had contact across the wall, 29% of those under 35 were in greater contact.



Table 10a: More specifically, how often do you interact with the community on the other side of nearest peace wall? (by religion)

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Very often	12	13	10
Often	10	9	10
Occasionally	18	12	21
Rarely	18	20	18
Never	42	46	42

Table 10b: More specifically, how often do you interact with the community on the other side of nearest peace wall? (by age)

	Total (%)	18-34 (%)	35-54 (%)	55 plus (%)
Very often	12	17	14	7
Often	10	12	9	8
Occasionally	18	15	19	20
Rarely	18	16	20	18
Never	42	40	37	47

Insofar as there is contact across the peace wall, most people believe that it has been positive. Among Catholics, 71% believed that contact was mostly or always positive, while 60% of Protestants shared that view (Table 11a). On the other hand, some 10% of Protestants reported that contact had been mostly negative, whereas this was true for 4% of Catholics. Interestingly, women (74%) (Table 11b) were much more likely to be positive about the quality of the interaction than men (59%), while 37% of respondents aged 18-34 said that their interaction was always positive, compared to 23% among the over 35s.

Table 11a: Is this interaction with the other community positive or negative? (by religion)

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Always positive	26	33	23
Mostly positive	41	27	48
Neither positive or negative	26	29	24
Mostly negative	6	10	4
Always negative	0	1	0

Table 11b: Is this interaction with the other community positive or negative? (by gender)

	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Always positive	26	21	31
Mostly positive	41	38	43
Neither positive or negative	26	32	21
Mostly negative	6	9	3
Always negative	0	0	1

### 3.3 Function of the peace wall

For respondents to the survey, the overwhelming function of the peace walls remains one of protection and safety by separation (Table 12). Among Protestants, 75% believed that the walls served to keep the communities apart. Some 72% saw the function of the wall protecting against republican violence, set against 36% who saw the wall as protecting against loyalist violence. Among Catholics, while 70% agreed that the walls were designed to separate communities, 57% saw them as a protection against loyalist violence whereas 33% saw them as a device to protect against republican violence. For most people, therefore, walls exist to protect us against them. The removal of peace-walls is therefore understood as a 'community safety issue'. Some 70% of Protestants and 58% of Catholics acknowledged that an important function of the peace wall was to make them feel safer.

Violence emanating from outside is therefore more important than the violence emanating from inside the community. Framed in this way, community concerns are likely to demand that policy tackles issues in 'the other community first rather than focus on internal community work to address the threat emanating from 'our side', creating potential dilemmas for policy makers.

Table 12: What is the current function of your nearest Peace Wall? (Strongly agree/agree)

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
To protect against Loyalist violence	48	36	57
To protect against Republican violence	46	72	33
To keep the communities apart from one another	70	75	70
To help me feel safer	61	70	58
To keep the communities under the control of the security forces	30	37	27
No idea	9	11	6

In order to establish the continuing importance of the peace walls for local residents, respondents were presented with a number of statements and asked to agree or disagree with them (Table 13). The results demonstrate that the function of peace walls is distinctively different for Catholics and Protestants. Among Protestants, 45% believe that the walls are necessary to allow

the community to freely celebrate its own culture, while 29% believe that their culture would disappear entirely without the protection of a wall. Among Catholics, by comparison, only 20% believe that a wall is required to protect the free celebration of culture, and 8% believe that it is necessary for the survival of their culture. This confirms that fears about cultural diversity are important drivers in the debate around peace walls, shaping social and economic circumstances, especially among Protestants.

Furthermore 21% believe that the walls make people feel more trapped, although more Catholic participants (61%) felt that peace walls send out a bad image of Northern Ireland abroad than Protestants (44%). There was some evidence that younger people feel more inconvenienced by the wall, with 29% of 18-34 year olds believing that the wall makes access to services harder compared to 18% of those over 55.

Although very few believe that there has been any economic benefit in the area since the peace process, 53% of Protestants and 48% of Catholics remain convinced that the walls are a tourist attraction. However, 39% of all respondents believe that the peace wall reduces local investment (Table 13).

Table 13: How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements about the positive and negative impact of Peace Walls in your area? (table reflects agree/strongly agree comments)

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
The Peace Wall is necessary for me to celebrate my culture freely	27	45	20
The Peace Wall stops my community expanding	25	24	27
The Peace Wall reduces investment in my area	39	36	41
The Peace Wall sends out a bad image of Northern Ireland to people abroad	55	44	61
Without the Peace Wall our community would disappear	15	29	8
The Peace Wall makes it harder to access some services like health, education or leisure	23	24	21
The Peace Wall is a tourist attraction	49	53	48
The Peace Wall makes people feel trapped	21	20	21

Peace walls have come to function as a protection against perceived chronic cultural threats as well as immediate threats to security, with wider political issues at stake in their removal. The existence or removal of peace walls has become entangled within wider challenges such as the legacy of the past, expressions of culture and identity, and the feared implication of a shared future in practice. Thus, perceived threats to survival on a particular interface may have regional political importance while, simultaneously, local public confidence in interface areas that might equate to support for any process to remove the walls is potentially defined by macro-political events.

### 3.4 Knowledge and understanding of policy

Given that TBUC is the key policy driving forward change in this area and is often cited, we asked respondents about specific aspects of the TBUC strategy that related to the removal of peace walls (Table 14). Participants in our survey indicated they had little knowledge of the Northern Ireland Executive's 2023 target – with 47% of respondents noting that they knew 'nothing at all' about the strategy. Those who knew hardly anything or nothing at all totalled 73%.

Participants were also asked to focus on the 2023 target specifically and to reflect whether they believed that the target to remove all walls was realistic. 60% of respondents did not believe the target to be realistic. This figure reflects a fairly widespread scepticism about the plausibility of their complete removal of walls by 2023.

Table 14: The Northern Ireland Executive has an on-going strategy to remove all Peace Walls in Northern Ireland by 2023, how much do you know about this initiative?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
A lot	6	5	6
A little	21	18	23
Hardly anything	26	24	26
Nothing at all	47	53	45

### 3.5 Roles and responsibilities in relation to peace walls

The issue of community engagement and consent has become much more significant since the publication of TBUC which said: "taking down interface barriers is not something that can be achieved without engagement with, consent and support of the people who live there. We must be sensitive of the views and perceptions of residents and balance this against the responsibility on us to create the conditions within which division and segregation can be resigned to the past".

Respondents were asked to indicate who they would contact if they had a question or issue about their nearest peace wall, with the largest number (41%) noting they would contact their 'local community representative'. Table 15 demonstrates that a significant number of residents (27%) 'don't know' who they would contact for assistance. It is also clear that most respondents value the interaction with their local community representatives over all other stakeholders. By contrast, no one would contact the Department of Justice or OFMDFM with their concerns. The absence of any shared understanding of the role for the state in the removal suggests that most people see

the walls as a response to community tensions (sectarianism, deprivation, and paramilitarism) managed by local leaders rather than a specific policy choice in relation to security and safety in which the state is obliged to secure the rule of law.

Table 15: If you had a question/issue about your nearest Peace Wall who would you go to in the first instance for assistance?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Local community representative	41	42	41
NI Housing Executive	6	7	5
Local Council	14	16	13
Department of Justice	0	0	1
Department for Regional Development	1	0	1
Department for Social Development	0	1	1
PSNI	11	11	12
The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister	0	1	0
Don't know	27	23	27

Given the limited knowledge about the initiatives underway or the 2023 target, it is unsurprising that there is no shared understanding around local consultation to enable the removal of local peace walls (Table 16). The findings suggest that more people would like to be consulted through their local newspapers than by any other method (53%). When face-to-face consultation is considered however, more people would like to be consulted through their community representatives in a door-to-door consultation process than by any other face-to-face method. That said, a large minority would like to be consulted through engagement with their political representatives (45%) and through regular public meetings (46%). Engagement with political representatives appears to be of less value to participants than engagement with local community representatives. It is also interesting to note that over one third of respondents (38%) would like to be consulted through social media.

Table 16: In principle, how would you like to be consulted about any future proposed changes to your local Peace Wall?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Door to door consultation by political Reps	45	53	44
Door to door consultation by community leaders	50	56	49
Door to door consultation by independent company/group	37	42	37
Public Meetings	46	48	45
Social media updates	38	36	38
Local newspapers	53	50	54
Don't want to know	13	12	13

Table 17 indicates that while more respondents believed that people in both communities will benefit from the removal of peace walls (52%), there is a large difference between Catholic (57%) and Protestant (43%) respondents.

Table 17: Who would benefit most from the removal of the Peace Wall in your area?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
People in the local community	15	11	16
People in the neighbouring community	9	13	8
People in both communities	52	43	57
People outside the local area	24	33	19

When asked (Table 18) 'Who would you expect to keep you informed about all issues related to the peace wall in your area?', some 43% of participants indicated that they would expect to hear from community representatives, considerably more than would expect to hear from the local council (20%), political representatives (16%), the Northern Ireland Executive (6%), the PSNI (3%), or the Department of Justice (2%). The absence of clarity on what constitutes a community representative presents a further challenge to change, although it is clear that most people expect change to be decided through local negotiation rather than unilateral action by government or a public body.

Table 18: Who would you expect to keep you informed about all issues related to the Peace Wall in your area?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Local community representatives	43	45	44
Local politicians representative of this community	16	18	15
The Local Council	20	19	20
Northern Ireland Executive	6	4	7
DoJ	2	2	1
PSNI	3	5	3
Other	2	2	1
Don't know	9	6	9

When asked 'Who do you think wants the peace wall in your community to be removed?' (Table 19) respondents believed that this was primarily driven by government agencies rather than local desire. Interestingly, participants appear to see themselves as more open to change than their neighbours. Thus 36% of respondents expressed a personal preference for the wall to be removed while, in contrast, only 18% believed that this was a majority view within their own community. Even fewer (15%) believed that the majority in the other community would like to see the walls removed.



Table 19: Who do you think wants the Peace Wall in your community to stay or go? (want it removed)

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
You personally	36	24	41
Most local people from this community	18	11	23
Most local people from the neighbouring community	15	13	16
Local Council	39	40	40
The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister	49	50	49
The Department of Justice	40	37	42
The PSNI	19	17	21

The definition of ‘community consent’ remains vague and so this survey sought to gather some initial perceptions from residents as to what community consent, meant to them (Table 20). The findings show that the largest proportion (38%), especially among Protestants (45%), believe that community consent means that ‘everybody in the community’ agrees with the decision. How such community consent could be achieved within an entire community without creating the opportunity for specific vetoes is problematic.

Table 20: What does community consent mean to you?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Everybody in the community agrees with the decision	38	45	36
50+1% of people in the community agree with a decision	26	20	26
A decision is made by those most closely affected by a proposal	25	23	28
A decision is made by locally elected political representatives	3	3	3
A decision is made by local community leaders	6	6	5

Recent research by Bell and Young (2013) highlights the complexities that surround developing a model of consultation and reinforces the idea that one aspect of effective consultation is to develop local knowledge to increase levels of engagement and create more informed decisions around options for regenerating or transforming interface communities. The challenge for those tasked with meeting the 2023 target is to ensure that local residents feel included in any process, have been consulted on proposed changes, and are aware of the implications of the policy.

### 3.6 Imagining the future

Respondents were asked to consider how they felt about the nearest peace wall in their area (Table 21) asking whether they would like the peace wall to remain or be dismantled now or in the future. The results indicate that the largest number of residents (35%) would like the peace wall to 'come down some time in the future'. More Catholics (40%) than Protestants (25%) were of this opinion. It was also evident that in terms of those residents that 'would like things left the way they are now', significantly more Protestants (44%) than Catholics (23%) supported this position.

Table 21 Thinking about these statements, which one comes to closest to your own view of the Peace Wall in your area?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
I would like things left the way they are now	30	44	23
I would like the Peace Wall to come down now	14	9	17
I would like the Peace Wall to come down some time in the future	35	25	40
I want to keep the Peace Wall, but have it opened for some accessibility	6	6	6
I would like to keep the Peace Wall, but change how it looks to make it more appealing	7	11	5
Don't know	8	5	9

Respondents were asked to consider what they felt the impact would be on their community if the peace wall were removed (Table 22). The findings suggest that many respondents expect there to be a deterioration in safety and security issues. Thus, only 10% expect no changes while 21% feel that there would be 'some significant incidents of anti-social behaviour and sectarian violence but only during particular dates, anniversaries or marches'. A further 20% of residents felt that the removal of the peace wall would result in constant anti-social behaviour and sectarian violence. Those from a Protestant background (33%) were more concerned that there would 'be constant problems with anti-social behaviour and sectarian violence', than those from a Catholic background (13%). The challenge to policy makers is therefore not only to achieve the target but to address fears that removal will result in a reduced quality of life.

Table 22: In principle, if the Peace Wall in your area WAS removed what is likely to happen?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Nothing, everything would stay the same as present	10	9	9
Minor incidents of anti-social behaviour	20	13	24
Some significant incidents of sectarian violence	17	21	17
Some significant incidents of anti-social behaviour and sectarian violence but only during particular dates/anniversaries or marches	21	17	23
Constant problems with anti-social behaviour and sectarian violence	20	33	13
Don't know	12	8	13

Building on the theme of safety and security, the survey asked participants to consider how confident they were in the police's ability to preserve peace and maintain order in the absence of a physical structure (Table 23). The findings suggest that just under one third of residents (29%) were very worried about how the PSNI would manage the environment if the peace wall was removed. Furthermore, Protestant respondents (61%) were more worried about the policing of their communities, than those from a Catholic background (43%). Only 29% of all participants were very or fairly confident of the police's ability to manage the transition of space.

Table 23: In principle if the Peace Wall in your area was removed how confident or worried would you be about the ability of the police to preserve peace and maintain order?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Very confident	6	4	8
Fairly confident	23	17	25
Neither confident or worried	13	11	15
Fairly worried	19	21	19
Very worried	29	40	24
Don't know	9	7	9

Although participants indicated concern at the police's ability to provide safety and security in the absence of peace walls, this did not seem to affect their views on leaving their home if the peace wall was removed (Table 24). The result showed that 11% would move home, while the majority (55%) would do nothing at all.

Table 24: In principle, if the Peace Wall in your area was removed what would you do?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Move house	11	18	8
Seek physical changes to my property	8	7	8
Take more security precautions	26	31	24
Nothing at all	55	45	60

With the focus very much on the future, the residents were asked to think about the various physical, political and economic changes that would need to take place within their community for the peace walls to be removed (Table 25). The most common response was for 'CCTV cameras to be installed in the area' (45%), closely followed by 'more youth programmes' (42%). Further analysis revealed that residents felt that local community leaders (34%) as opposed to local politicians (26%) working together would be more conducive to creating the conditions for the removal of peace walls.

Table 25: Suppose a long-term decision was taken, with consent from your local community, to remove the Peace Wall in your area. What are most important things that would need to be done now in preparation for that to happen?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
CCTV cameras to be installed in the area	45	48	44
Better street lighting	24	22	25
More youth programmes	42	35	46
More policing	39	41	39
Local politicians working together across the political divide	26	21	28
New housing where it is needed	23	21	24
Local community leaders working together across the political divide	34	33	36
Physical improvement in the area	19	20	16
Investment and jobs	35	30	38

The survey asked about residents' views on the continued impact of the peace wall in their community (Table 26). The majority of people thought that issues such as jobs (76%); access to services like health, education and leisure (77%) and relationships between the two communities would simply stay the same as they currently are.

Table 26: If the Peace Wall in your community remains, what effect will it have on the following?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Jobs in this area	76	78	76
Relations between the two communities	68	68	70
Business investment in this area	65	67	66
Community safety	68	69	68
Government investment in this area	62	65	61
Tourism to this area	66	69	66
Access to services like health, education and leisure	77	78	78
The image of Northern Ireland abroad	63	70	62
People's health and wellbeing	68	72	67

Finally, the participants were asked to consider whether they thought there would be a time in the future when there would be no peace walls within their area (Table 27). The largest number of people (41%) thought that there would be an occasion in the future when all the peace walls would be dismantled. However, a further 41% were of the view that the peace walls would always be a part of the built environment. Interestingly, more Catholics (48%) than Protestants (27%) were more likely to believe that the peace walls would be taken down in the future.

Table 27: Can you envisage a time when there will be no Peace Walls in this area?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Yes	41	27	48
No	41	56	34
Don't know	17	17	18

Since the announcement of TBUC, the Northern Ireland Executive has appeared to be divided on many issues and this may be reflected in survey responses. Disputes over the route of a parade in North Belfast led to widespread rioting and the establishment of a protest encampment. Inter-party talks to address contentious issues chaired by Richard Haass and Megan O'Sullivan broke up in acrimony and without agreement in late 2013. Additional disagreements over budgets led to further talks in 2014. Apparent success proved insufficient to prevent further polarisation during 2015. Parading disputes and allegations of renewed paramilitary activity led to further talks in Autumn 2015. Uncertainty in politics has been matched by greater tension in inter-community relations at local level. Engaging communities in a shared vision of safety has proved challenging with suggestions that TBUC has lacked urgency and priority and can be detected in survey responses.

### 3.7 Comparison with the 2012 survey

Since the last survey was conducted in 2012, it is important to note that changes in attitudes since then will necessarily reflect political and demographic changes that have taken place over the last three years. It should also be noted that the 2012 survey did not include the Lurgan/Portadown area.

Respondents were asked in both surveys to consider who they felt was most the appropriate person to keep them informed about issues relating to the peace wall (Table 28). The results suggest that the key difference surrounds the increase in support for local community representatives from 29% in 2012 to 43% in 2015, and the subsequent decrease in support for political representatives, from 29% in 2012 to 16% in 2015.

Table 28: Who would you expect to keep you informed about all issues related to Peace Walls in your area?

	Total response in 2012 (%)	Total response in 2015 (%)
Local community reps	28	43
Local political reps	29	16
Local Council	17	20
N.I. Executive	7	6
DoJ	1	2
PSNI	3	3
Other	2	2
Don't know	7	9

When asked about who wants peace walls removed or kept (Table 29), our results showed that the key difference relates to attitudes towards the DOJ and OFMdFM. In 2012 (34%) felt that the OFMdFM wanted them removed, compared to 49% in 2015. Similarly, in 2012 (28%) felt that the DOJ wanted the peace walls in their community dismantled, compared to 40% in 2015.

Table 29: Who do you think wants the Peace Wall in your community to be removed?

	Total response in 2012 (%)	Total response in 2015(%)
You personally	38	36
Most local people from this community	20	18
Most local people from the neighbouring community	18	15
Local Council	35	39
The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister	34	49
The Department of Justice	28	40
The PSNI	13	19



Comparing the two surveys reveals a degree of change in resident attitudes to the future of peace walls (Table 30). In 2012, 22% of people wanted ‘things left the way they are now’. By 2015 that number had risen to 30%. Even more starkly, the proportion of people wanting the peace wall to come down some time in the future, had decreased from 44% in 2012 to 35% in 2015.

Table 30: Thinking about these statements, which one comes to closest to your own view of the Peace Wall in your area?

	Total response in 2012 (%)	Total response in 2015 (%)
I would like things left the way they are now	22	30
I would like the Peace Wall to come down now	14	14
I would like the Peace Wall to come down some time in the future	44	35
I want to keep the Peace Wall, but have it opened for some accessibility	9	6
I would like to keep the Peace Wall, but change how it looks to make it more appealing	8	7
Don't know	3	8

The 2015 survey also recorded a reduction in concerns (from 37% in 2012 to 21% in 2015) about the potential for anti social behaviour and sectarian violence during particular dates/anniversaries or marches. (Table 31)

Table 31: In principle, if the Peace Wall in your area WAS removed what is likely to happen?

	Total response in 2012 (%)	Total response in 2015 (%)
Nothing, everything would stay the same as present	5	10
Minor incidents of anti-social behaviour	18	20
Some significant incidents of sectarian violence	12	17
Some significant incidents of anti-social behaviour and sectarian violence but only during particular dates/anniversaries or marches	37	21
Constant problems with anti-social behaviour and sectarian violence	23	20
Don't know	5	12

Comparison of the two surveys indicates a small difference in residents' levels of confidence in the police's ability to preserve peace and maintain order (Table 32). Whereas in 2012 the results indicated that 58% were fairly and/or very worried, this figure had decreased to 48% by 2015.

Table 32: In principle, if the Peace Wall in your area was removed how confident or worried would you be about the ability of the police to preserve peace and maintain order?

	Total response in 2012 (%)	Total response in 2015 (%)
Very confident	4	6
Fairly confident	20	23
Neither confident or worried	14	13
Fairly worried	29	19
Very worried	29	29
Don't know	5	9

Finally, both surveys asked residents whether they could envisage a time when there would be no peace walls in their area (Table 33). Analysis has revealed that there are subtle differences across the two time periods, with 38% in 2012 and 41% in 2015 believing this might be. Furthermore, those residents that don't think there will be a time when there will be no peace walls in their area decreased from 45% in 2012 to 41% in 2015.

Table 33: Can you envisage a time when there will be no Peace Walls in this area?

	Total response in 2012 (%)	Total response in 2015 (%)
Yes	38	41
No	45	41
Don't know	18	17

## 4. Key Findings

This is the second independent survey looking at public awareness and attitudes towards peace walls in Northern Ireland. Aside from adding to existing quantitative research and increasing the body of knowledge, we are now in a better position to explore whether there have been changes in the views and attitudes of those living closest to the peace walls.

The following section draws together the key findings from the 2015 edition of the survey under three headings: the most relevant views and attitudes of all residents towards the peace walls; the views and attitudes of residents disaggregated to show differences by religion; and variations in the views and attitudes between the 2012 and 2015 editions of this survey.

### 4.1 Views and attitudes of residents

**41%** could envisage a time when there would be no peace walls and **41%** could not. Catholics were more optimistic about this than Protestants [table 27]

**76%** feel 'very safe' or 'fairly safe' in their community, while less than **10%** feel unsafe [table 7]

**48%** would be 'very worried' or 'fairly worried' about the ability of the police to maintain order if their nearest peace wall was removed, rising to **61%** among Protestants [table 23]

**50%** interact with people outside of their own community background 'very often' or 'often' [table 8]

**79%** report that their interaction with other communities is positive and only **3%** described it as negative [table 9]

**22%** interact with people from the immediate community on the other side of the wall. **42%** have no contact with the community across the wall [table 10a]

**41%** would go to their local community representative if they had a 'question' or 'issue' about their nearest peace wall, compared to **14%** to the local council and **11%** to the police [table 15]

**43%** would expect to be kept informed about developments relating to the peace wall by local community representatives, compared to **20%** expecting information from Councils and **16%** from elected representatives [table 18]

**38%** of residents believe that community consent means everybody in the community [table 20]

**52%** felt both communities would benefit most from the removal of peace walls, although this was stronger among Catholics (**57%**) than Protestants (**43%**). **33%** of Protestants thought that the greatest benefit of the removal of peace walls would be to people outside the community [table 17]

**36%** report that they want the Peace Wall in their community removed but only **18%** believe that this represents most people in their community [table 19]

The results of the survey show that the communities on either side of the peace walls have ongoing connections with wider society in Northern Ireland with around half reporting that they have regular contact with people from ‘the other’ community. Almost 80% describe this interaction as positive and only 3% as negative. Despite this, there is no doubt that the level of inter-community interaction at local level in the vicinity of peace walls is much less, with only 22% reporting regular contact and 42% reporting that they ‘never’ interact with people who live on the other side of their nearest peace wall.

More than three quarters of all respondents said that they felt very or fairly safe in the shadow of the wall. In contrast, the majority of residents expressed significant anxiety that both sectarian and anti-social behaviour would increase should the wall be removed. Furthermore, 48% of residents doubt that the police could offer the same level of security as that currently provided by a physical barrier. Among Protestants, 61% expressed this concern. This suggests that many people remain sceptical that security can be assured except through physical barriers and presents a significant challenge to policy-makers to develop other means of reassurance and safety.

Although the peace walls were erected and paid for by government departments and public bodies, more than twice as many local residents (43%) would look to their community activists to provide information on them, than would look to local Councils or other statutory representatives. This suggests that community activists continue to play an important role in influencing how and whether the walls will be removed and in shaping community attitudes towards the continued existence of peace walls and is striking compared to the relatively minor role played by elected members. The survey did not identify the political or community associations of key activists, although this might be a fruitful area for further study.

Current policy relies on community consent as a critical step prior to the removal of peace walls, but does not define who this would involve, how and when it is to be measured or how it is to be achieved. Currently the survey suggests that the largest number of people living near interface barriers (38%) support unanimous consensus as necessary, rising to 45% among Protestants. However, the boundaries of participation remain uncertain. If this expectation is to be met, however, the need for political leaders and statutory agencies responsible for policy to engage widely is apparent.

## 4.2 Views and attitudes of residents by religion

**52%** of Protestants felt their area had not benefited from the peace process, compared to **25%** of Catholics [table 6]

**82%** of Catholics felt 'very safe' or 'fairly safe' in their area, as opposed to **69%** of Protestants [table 7]

Protestants (**45%**) were more than twice as likely as Catholics (**20%**) to indicate that their local peace wall was necessary to enable them to celebrate their culture freely [table 13]

**57%** of Catholics want the Wall down either now or in the future. Only **34%** of Protestants feel the same. Protestant participants (**44%**) were almost twice as likely as Catholic participants (**23%**) to want things 'left the way they are now' [table 21]

**56%** of Protestants in the survey cannot envisage a time when there will be no peace walls. **48%** of Catholics in the survey can envisage such a time [table 27]

**33%** of Protestants anticipate constant problems with anti-social behaviour and sectarian violence, as opposed to **13%** of Catholics if the peace wall was removed. But more Catholics (**23%**) than Protestants (**17%**) expect incidents associated with particular dates and anniversaries [table 22]

The survey suggests that **18%** of Protestants and **8%** of Catholics would move house if the wall in their area was removed [Table 24]

The level of pessimism around the actual and potential benefits of the peace process is striking. **52%** of Protestants can detect no benefit of the peace process to their areas whatsoever. While Catholics were generally less pessimistic, and **38%** reported more peaceful surroundings, only **3%** saw any economic benefit. Although **50%** in both communities saw the peace wall as an attraction, over **75%** in both communities expected no changes in the number of jobs from the removal of walls.

Protestants responding to this survey are consistently more nervous and suspicious of change in peace walls than their Catholic neighbours. The majority of Protestants (**56%**) cannot currently envisage a time when there will be no walls. TBUC policy does not make clear whether community consent will be assessed as a majority of all residents living close to a physical barrier or whether there is a requirement for dual consent on both sides of any wall.

Within Protestant communities the local issues surrounding peace walls appear to have become aligned with wider macro-political challenges. It appears from the survey that Protestants regard the walls as an impediment to anti-social behaviour and sectarianism and as a protection which

enables the community to celebrate its culture freely - a freedom presumably put at risk by the removal of peace walls. Indeed some **29%** of Protestants suggested that without the Peace Wall their community would disappear. This was true for only **8%** of Catholics. The driving force behind retaining peace walls may therefore now be **both** an immediate fear of violence **and** the sense that shared communities will not tolerate 'Protestant' culture. This statistic reinforces previous work from Nolan (2014), which suggested that a perceived attack on cultural issues such as flags, parades and bonfires has been interpreted within some Protestant communities as a direct consequence of the peace process. Interestingly, however, the fear of greater violence around cultural events appears to be greatest among Catholics.

### ***4.3 Comparisons between surveys – 2012 and 2015***

A sharp rise in the proportion of participants expecting local community representatives to keep them informed about all issues related to peace walls in their area in 2015, than they did in 2012 (**43%**, up from **28%**) and a fall in expectations of local politicians. (from **29%** to **16%**) [table 28]

More people living at interfaces believe that the drive to remove walls come from outside the local community than from local people. This trend has increased in 2015 (**40%**) since 2012 (**28%**) [table 29]

There has been an increase in the proportion of respondents saying that they want things left the way they are now (from **22%** in 2012 to **30%** in 2015) and a decrease in the proportion saying they would like the Peace Wall to come down some time in the future (from **44%** in 2012 to **35%** in 2015) [table 30]

The evidence suggests that in the last three years those that reside closest to the peace walls believe that the NI Executive, especially through the DoJ and OFMDfM, is involved in processes that are aimed at removing the peace walls. On the other hand, 47% stated that they knew nothing at all about the Executive's TBUC strategy, and a further 27% knew 'hardly anything'. This suggests that the detail of the strategy has not yet made any significant impact on local awareness, although the fact that peace walls are under discussion is known.

In 2012, twice as many people wanted the peace walls down in the future (44%) than wanted them kept as they are (22%). By 2015 opinion had changed so that only (35%) would like to see the walls come down in the future. Ironically, this comes at a time when the NI Executive has developed a strategy and published a target date for the removal of all the peace walls. This suggests that the political circumstances surrounding the peace walls, notably the climate of inter-community relations and sense of safety, has deteriorated over the last three years and that the 'peace process' in relation to interfaces has, in part, gone into reverse.



It also raises a number of fundamental challenges to those charged with delivering a stated target in relation to peace walls:

- What options are presented to residents to encourage them to support the removal of peace walls?
- What benefits will be delivered to local communities as a result of removal?
- Are mechanisms in place, which allow residents to imagine and visualise what their neighbourhoods would be like in the absence of barriers?
- Why have security and cultural concerns risen over the last three years rather than declined?
- Has enough progress been made so that residents can actually believe that government is serious and wants to meet the target date of 2023?
- Who should have primary responsibility for keeping local residents informed and engaged in discussions over the future of peace walls?

## 5. Concluding Remarks

There is a key difference in the wider context within which the survey of 2012 and that of 2015 have developed – the future of peace walls in Northern Ireland is now significantly underpinned by the commitment of the Northern Ireland Executive, through TBUC strategy, for their complete removal by 2023.

The responses to this 2015 survey make clear the challenge which faces the Executive in delivering its target of removing all peace walls with community consent by 2023. While the findings from this survey are mixed, as they also were in the 2012 edition of this report, there is some evidence that relationships between the communities have grown more suspicious and that the appetite for change evident at earlier times has diminished in 2015. This anxiety about the immediate and permanent consequences of change appears to be especially evident within the Protestant community.

The most salient findings for policy makers and key stakeholders are:

- Many people responding to the survey could identify no benefits from the peace process. Almost nobody identified any economic progress as a result of peace.
- One fifth of respondents identified an improvement in safety resulting from the peace process.
- More than 40% of respondents had no contact with anyone living on the other side of their nearest peace wall. Contact was most frequent among younger people.
- More than a fifth of respondents have no interaction at all with anyone from outside their own community. Interaction is more common among younger people and among women.
- There is no clear consensus among residents as to what constitutes ‘community consent’.
- Community representatives are the most frequently identified conduit for information and opinion about peace wall related issues.
- People living near peace walls believe that their primary function is to separate communities and prevent violence coming from the outside into the community. Less people believe that their function is to prevent violence emanating from within their own community.
- Many Protestants in the survey believe that the peace walls are necessary for the free expression of culture and for the survival of the community.

The possibility of a future consensus for the removal or transformation of peace walls will therefore depend on many interdependent factors including:

- The wider atmosphere of community relations.
- Clear leadership from political parties at both central and local level in support of the policy.
- Addressing concerns about safety and security.

- Ensuring that there is a clear future for cultural pluralism, which secures all cultural traditions.
- Opportunities to consider and imagine the consequences of change for communities.
- Addressing issues of economic, social and environmental concern which can result from the removal of peace walls, including the identification of sufficient resources.

In conclusion, the survey suggests that the removal of peace walls raises issues of safety, regeneration, culture and economics. And that the delivery of the 2023 target will require inter-Departmental and inter-agency collaboration.

## 6. References

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## Notes

