



Community Engagement in Clandeboyne - *Valuing the Voices of Residents*



June 15



Overview:

Clandeboyne area is a proud and respectful, predominantly Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist (PUL) community in the Bangor area which is keen to support the expression of its tradition, culture and heritage in ways that are accessible, family-friendly and develop community spirit and ownership. There have been very positive developments in the area in recent years and the Clandeboyne Village Community Association (CVCA) is committed to continuing to listen to residents and respond to their needs. There has been a new development in the area - as of the 27th March 2015, for the first time, there has been the erection of paramilitary flags. Although some other areas across North Down have had a history of flying paramilitary flags, it is understood that this came about in those areas via agreement with the community stakeholders and endorsement by residents; this is not the case in the Clandeboyne area. In the past, Union flags have proudly and respectfully flown in Clandeboyne without issue or concern.

In addition, there have also been tyres dumped at the bonfire site and a noticeable presence of people from outside the Clandeboyne area involved in the dumping of tyres, flag erection and presence at the bonfire site. CVCA also learnt from Council that a group from outside and not representative of the area has applied to the Council for the funding to run the 11th bonfire and attached celebrations because that group believes that Clandeboyne is one of their 'designated sites'. The role of running the 11th of July celebrations and following Fun Day, hosting over 400-500 people each year, has been undertaken to date by CVCA, local young people and community volunteers, with the aim to create a fun, safe, accessible and inclusive celebration of local culture and heritage. The CVCA Fun Day runs in August, which the Clandeboyne community was consulted about, and decided that this was the preferred option to suit families with young children. Logic would determine that if something is working well, why would anyone seek to destroy it?

The community and its many residents are confused about these developments as they have created a tangible sense of unrest, fear and tension in the area. Therefore, in the absence of any explanation, people can only conclude that people from outside the community are seeking to exert some control in the Clandeboyne area. The questions posed regularly by concerned parents, grand parents and residents are simply, 'Why would an outside group do this?' and 'What benefit is it bringing to the Clandeboyne area?' Such tensions and fear do not create the environment needed to increase the hopes, aspirations and the opportunities for development needed in working class PUL areas. Rather than affirm and build up a community, these developments, if accepted and 'normalised' have the potential to adversely affect the local young people, families and wider community severely, both presently and in generations to come.



In response to the residents grave concerns for the safety of the local young people involved in the bonfire, as well as some concerning observations (intimidation, increased violence, manipulation of vulnerable residents, etc), CVCA was approached by a 142 residents asking CVCA to discover what the Ards and North Down Council, PSNI and local elected representatives are doing to address the issue.

Since these developments, CVCA have held countless meetings with all levels of local council and government to address the issues and ask them to undertake their roles and responsibilities. No significant action has been taken to date. In addition, concerns from residents continued to rise, including grave concerns from the local Primary school (Annex 1) expressing their distress during a particularly sad period. In response to this, CVCA was asked to host a public meeting to create a space for residents to express directly to council staff, councillors and the PSNI their concerns and sense of fear.

This report is summary of the process undertaken, the findings from the public meeting, wider consultation, and feedback from local schools and businesses. It concludes with a few final recommendations, including that paramilitary flags should be replaced by Union flags, that CVCA should continue to run the 11th of July celebrations for the Clandeboyne area, and that statutory organisations carry out their roles and responsibilities.

Update as of 19th June 2015: At a specially convened Council meeting on the 8th of June, the Councillors decided not to fund the outside group and subsequently this group withdrew its application for funding. Residents also report that there continues to be a presence at the bonfire site of the outside group, flags continue to fly - with the only flag that was removed being re-erected on the 18th of June, additionally, large amounts of tyres have been returned to the site, including tractor tyres.

Significantly, as a direct consequence of the fears and anxiety created by the many events over the past three months, the Clandeboyne community is disconnected from the current bonfire site and there is no longer any significant presence or involvement of local Clandeboyne people or young people.



1.1 Statutory Responsibility

It is well documented that government departments and officials have struggled to agree a protocol on flags, with even more recent attempts such as the Haass Talks failing to produce an agreed way forward. The current OFMDFM joint protocol in relation to the display of flags in public areas outlines 'an agreed partnership approach in dealing with flags issues between the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Department of the Environment (DOE), Department for Regional Development (DRD), Department for Social Development (DSD), Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).' The document provides direction for these departments to work together, but provides very limited detail of how this should be done. It does state however, that if there is tension around the issue, then the PSNI should take the lead role¹.

The Ards and North Down Borough Council's Policy on flags, bonfires and other such protocols are either held within the Cultural Expression Policy or are in development.

1.2 Clandeboyne Village Community Association & the Community

Established in 2004, CVCA, like many community associations, is run solely by a team of dedicated local residents who give their free time towards doing their part in making the Clandeboyne area the best it can be; by creating opportunities to support local people of all ages, meet local needs and campaign to secure the community facilities required for the area. These combined efforts develop the social capital (trust, relationships and friendships) amongst residents and builds the community spirit of the area. Key to the success of the CVCA has been a commitment over recent years to consulting with local residents about their views and opinions about issues, and using the information gathered to inform the direction and priorities of CVCA.

Other housing areas across North Down and Bangor run in different ways, and what works in one community can differ to others. Clandeboyne is an area, that has people from all walks of life, and to date there has not been a sense that the Clandeboyne area is governed or controlled by any particular paramilitary group, more that all people are welcome in the area from various walks of life and with a range of backgrounds and experiences - be they business people, ex-combatants, former security forces, victims/survivors, church-goers, people from all races, religions and views. Based on the experience of Clandeboyne, the integration of all these types of people really adds value to the area, while respectfully sharing the Unionist identity.

¹ The Flag Dispute - Anatomy of a Protest, 2014, Paul Nolan et al.

1.3 The Issues of Concern

On the 27th March 2015, 6 paramilitary flags were erected in the Clandeboyne area, originally mainly around the family-focused sites such as the play park, and then moved to the arterial routes and public buildings such as the Old Ebenezer Gospel Hall. Over the following nights, trailer loads of tyres were dumped at the bonfire site. These developments regarding the erecting of paramilitary flags and the dumping of tyres resulted in the CVCA committee members being inundated with phone calls and approaches by local residents and parents who were gravely concerned, with many continuing to feel very fearful and intimidated.

Council staff informed CVCA that a community representative from a group outside the area confirmed they were aware of the issues and suggested to Council staff that Clandeboyne was one of their 'designated sites', and that they could 'control' and 'do something' about the issues, and in addition, that they would be applying for the small Council grant issued each year to run the Clandeboyne 11th of July celebrations - which CVCA has secured and used each year for the enjoyment of local residents. This Council Officer asked if CVCA would be prepared to meet with this group to address the 'issues'. The CVCA position was that it was the responsibility of the paid and elected representatives involved to take a lead on this issue and they (Council) should be meeting with the group from outside the area to resolve the 'issues'.



Since the 27th March, CVCA representatives have spent 12 weeks meeting with local Council Officers, Councillors, MLAs and the PSNI to request, on behalf of the residents who are fearful and feeling intimidated, that each of these paid and/or elected representatives undertake their designated role in addressing the issues and re-establishing the harmony and sense of safety that the Clandeboyne area has experienced up until this point. Although many sympathised with the plight of fearful residents - no action was taken by these representatives or their organisations. Only after the public meeting on the 21st May 2015, held by CVCA, were the tyres removed (on 25th May after Council secured consent from the outside group); the flags continue to fly, except for one which was removed. After these initial positive developments during the month of June, the outside group continue to have a presence at the bonfire site, more tyres have been dumped and the only flag which was removed has been re-erected.

1.4 Context & Key Factors:

- 4 years ago, CVCA consulted with residents and held a meeting asking if a bonfire should continue in the Clandeboyne area - there was a clear desire from the 200+ residents who participated that they would like the 11th night bonfire celebrations to continue, but would prefer the funded family event 'Fun Day' be delayed to a few weeks later and held through the day time.
- Therefore, since 2011, CVCA and the local young people and residents have hosted the 11th night celebrations and followed this in early August each year, with some of the most successful Fun Days in the Borough, with over 400 from the Clandeboyne and surrounding areas attending.
- All of the funding secured for the 11th celebrations is directed to paying for the Fun Day and making the event free and accessible to all residents.
- None of the funding secured is used to buy wood/pallets, and the young people of the Clandeboyne area work tirelessly over the spring and summer months to gather wood to create an 11th night bonfire. They also work together with CVCA to keep the area tidy and respond to concerns/issues as they may arise, such as smaller fires and illegal dumping.
- After 20 years without any significant investment, a petition signed by over 1,200 people, CVCA, on behalf of local residents secured £415,000 worth of investment from North Down Borough Council to transform the water-logged field and only green space in the area into: a play park; a multi-use games area (MUGA); and a new grass football pitch. The Clandeboyne park officially opened in March 2015 much to the delight of local families and residents. This has caused a significant increase in the community spirit of the area as families now have a safe and pleasant place to visit and enjoy. Clandeboyne Primary school, local estate agents and businesses have all noticed and shared (through meetings and in correspondence with local elected representatives) how these developments have impacted positively on the school and businesses.
- During construction of the new Clandeboyne Park, CVCA ensured provision of a bonfire site - that the young people who continued to value the experience of the bonfire and the expression of heritage in this way could continue. However, the building of the park, MUGA and football pitch meant that the bonfire site would be smaller in 2015 and beyond. Local young people and residents were involved in this decision and have been kept informed throughout.
- The Good Relations Unit of Ards and North Down Borough Council have received many calls about these issues from concerned residents.

2 The Process

2.1 Why have a public meeting?

There are a number of reasons why a public meeting was necessary:

- None of the statutory organisations or elected councillors were prepared to take a lead role in addressing the issue, even though all were aware of the fear and concern from residents.
- For residents to be heard by their elected representatives and those with statutory responsibility such as Ards and North Down Borough Council and the PSNI.
- CVCA consults residents about any major developments in the area as a best practice approach, and this method is consistent with practice to date.
- Due to the high demand from residents and the serious concerns for safety.
- To create the space to hear ALL views and opinions about the issues in an open and transparent manner.
- To reflect the pride, respect and value of the Unionist culture and history that the CVCA and Clandeboyne residents have, and how this is reflected already in the area.
- Agreeing roles and responsibilities of those with statutory responsibility, so that a co-ordinated and effective approach could be taken to address the issues.
- Central was that the public meeting was completely open to all, advertised widely via posters, leaflets, social media and word of mouth, to ensure that anyone interested in attending and participating were given the same opportunity.

2.2 Methods

As there was a high level of anxiety and fear with local residents, it was necessary to provide three main approaches to the content of the public meeting, they included:

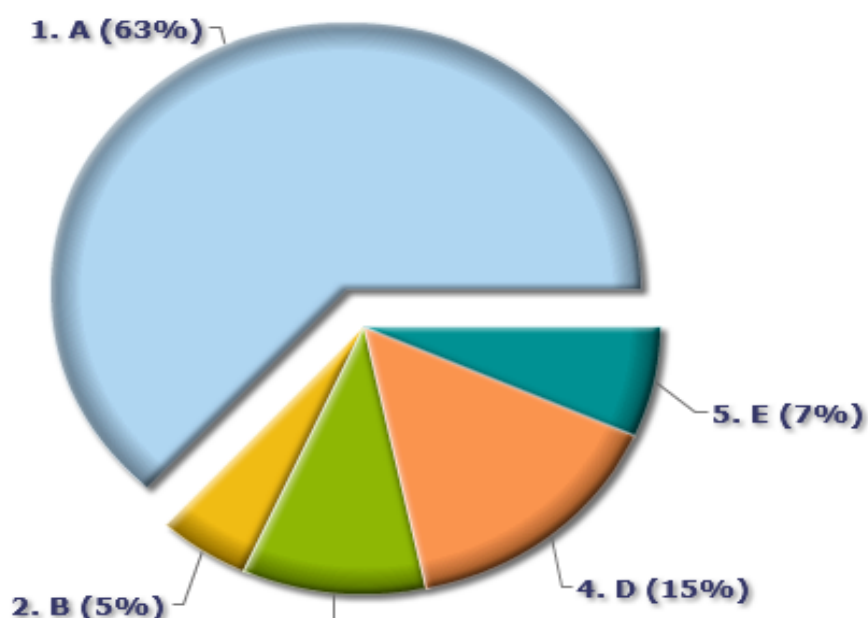

1. Quizdom - use of an interactive tool which gathers responses to multiple choice questions and allows views to be gathered anonymously.
2. Facilitated Q&A - a facilitated section of the meeting was created for people to share their views directly, add anything that they thought the Quizdom process did not answer, and also ask questions directly.
3. Written feedback - again to facilitate anonymous feedback and allow all views to be shared. Anonymous feedback was also gathered via written comments in a closed box at the front and back of the meeting room. Also, both before and after the meeting, there were private messages left on social media and with CVCA committee members regarding the issues - they too have been included in the report.



3 The findings: 102 people attended the public meeting, QUIZDOM had 60 handsets, so some people answered as married couples and others with like minded friends and family.

1. Please tick the statement which most applies to you?

- A) I am a current resident of the clandeboyne area
- B) I am a former resident of the clandeboyne area
- C) I have family in the clandeboyne area
- D) I am a representative from statutory organisation
- E) I am a representative from a community organisation



The majority of those in attendance were local current residents of the Clandeboyne Community at 63% of responses. With 5% being former Clandeboyne residents, and a further 10% having family in the area. A significant portion of representatives from statutory organisations (15%) and 7% from other community groups.

2. Do you feel the recent introduction of paramilitary flags and the paramilitary influence at the bonfire - maintains and develops the level of goodwill in the Clandeboye area ?

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) Not Sure



The Ards and North Down Cultural Expressions Programme and Policy states that any funded activity should ‘maintain and develop the goodwill in communities’, the response from the room clearly indicates that 85% of people feel that the flags and tyres do not maintain and develop goodwill.

Additional comments included:

- *I am afraid, my children are afraid - why isn't anyone doing anything to help?*
- *Why have these flags been allowed to fly for 9 weeks when they obviously intimidate and worry people?*
- *This is a great place to live, but this doesn't help and makes the place feel awful.*

3. Do you think that the paramilitary flags in Clandeboyne should be removed?

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) Not Sure



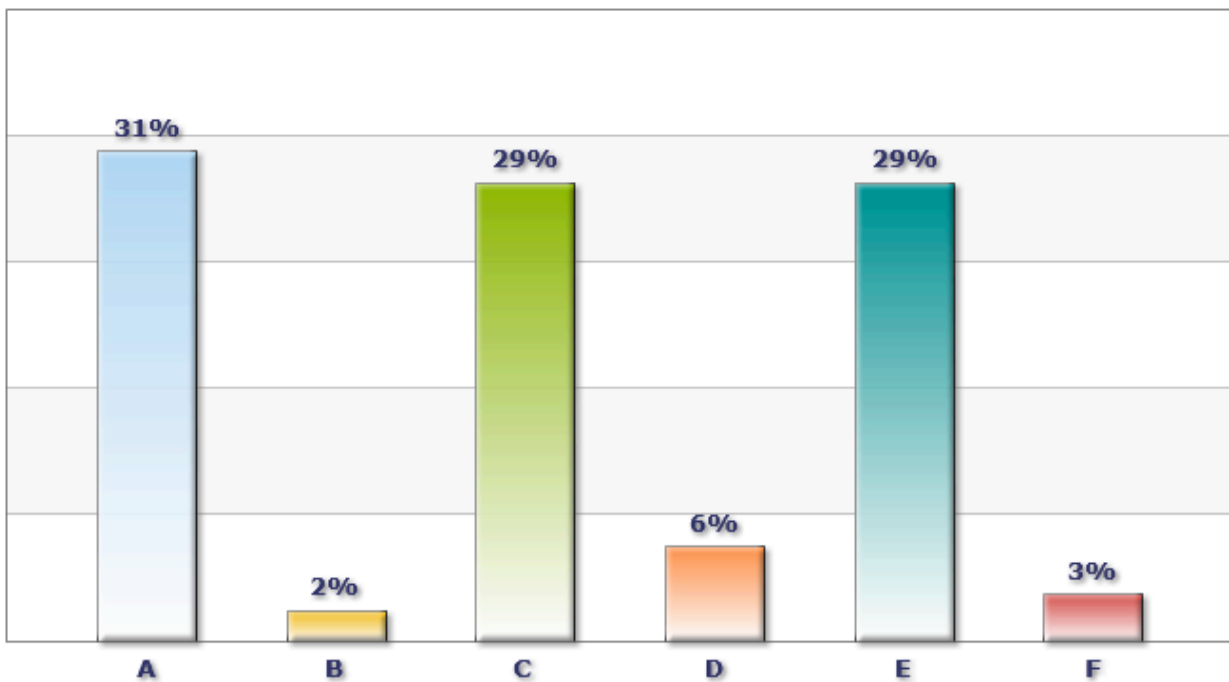
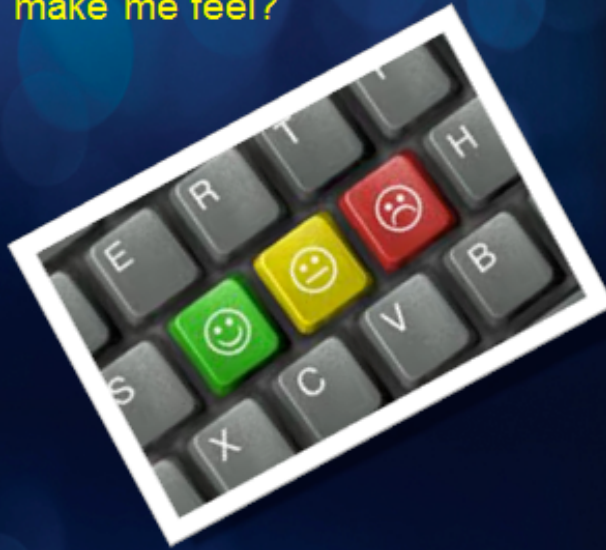
An 11% minority were in favour of the flags continuing to fly, which reflects the inclusiveness of the process used in creating space for all views. However this view was massively outweighed by an 85% majority stating that the paramilitary flags should be removed from the area. A reflection of the concern of residents and their lack of support for these flags.

Additional comments being:

- *Would Council allow these flags to be flown in the town centre or in the streets where they live?*
- *Are these flags being flown outside the homes of the people who put them up?*
- *I believe that this is an infringement on my human rights!*
- *Other than trying to take over an already proud and well organised Unionist community and create fear, why would they be put up?*
- *This doesn't build respect or pride in the Unionist or Loyalist tradition, it disconnects people from it.*

4. Please tick the statement/s which most applies to you – The paramilitary flags in Clandeboye make me feel?

- A) Worried
- B) Safe
- C) Fearful
- D) Proud
- E) Intimidated
- F) No feelings



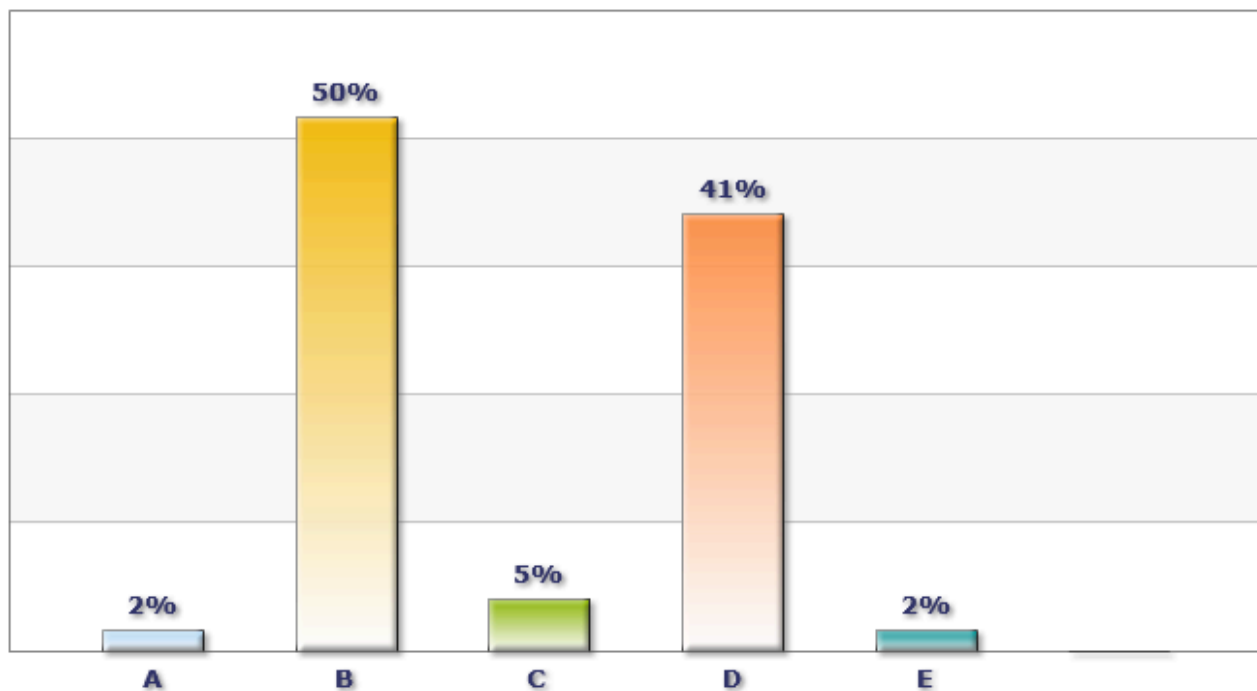
A very clear 89% majority stating that the paramilitary flags make them feel worried (31%), fearful (29%) and intimidated (29%).

Comments included:

- *It makes the community feel intimidated and insecure. This is intimidation and unacceptable in the year of 2015.*
- *Our young people deserve better than this, and so do all those who have worked so hard to improve the community.*
- *Now the young ones and the community can't even enjoy the build up to the 12th - what's the point? It's all been taken over by outsiders.*
- *Expressing our culture and heritage should make people feel proud and positive - this does the opposite.*

5. Please tick the statement/s which most applies to you - I think the flags being erected are to...

- A) Develop community spirit and bring people together
- B) To try to take control of the community
- C) To make people proud of the community
- D) To create fear and intimidate residents
- E) Unsure



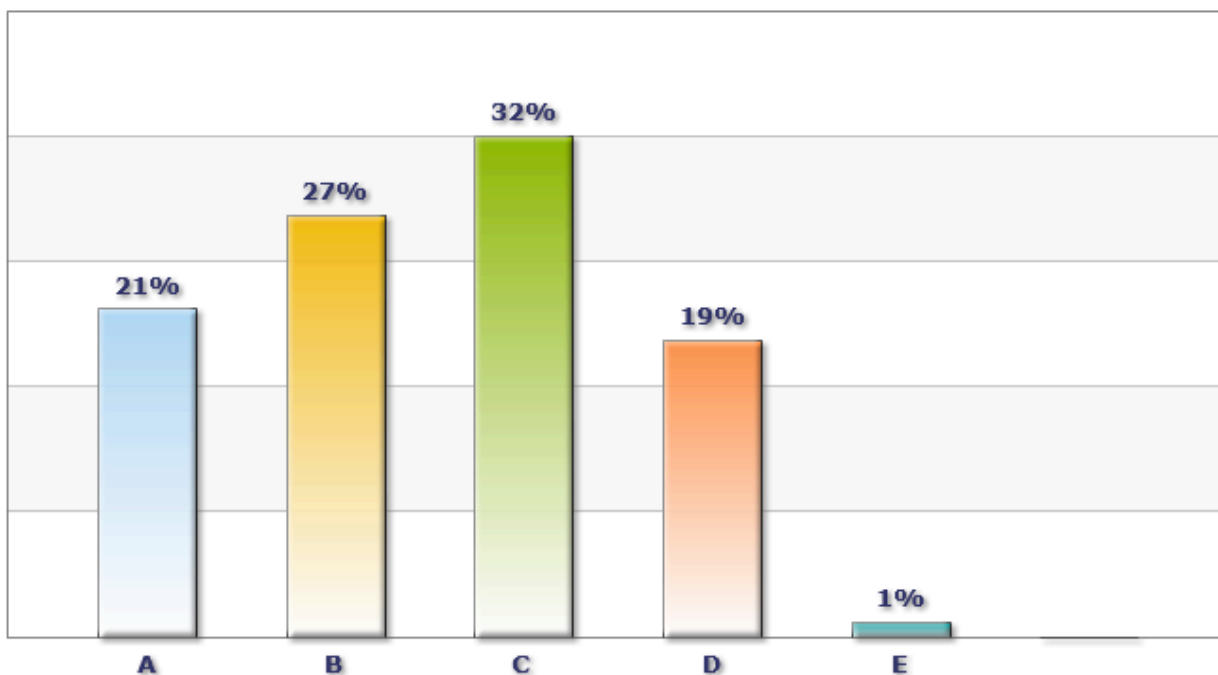
A very clear 91% majority stating that the paramilitary flags are being erected to take control of the area (50%) and cause fear and intimidation (41%).

Comments included:

- *What other reasons could there be for this? What does it bring to the area that is positive?*
- *It's simple - you can FEEL the difference, never mind see it - ask anyone.*
- *My fear, is that this all becomes the 'norm', then it will get worse every year, and I don't just mean flags, I mean the presence and there is no need.*
- *There was a time when communities needed defending and protection - but it's 2015, this is no longer the case - this is not moving on or making PUL communities better.*
- *Is council aware of the group/people who have erected the flags?*

6. Please tick the statement/s which most applies to you - I would prefer...?

- A) No flags to fly at all
- B) Residents to fly the flags of their choosing on their own properties
- C) If flags are to fly they would be Union flags
- D) If flags are to fly they would be Northern Ireland (ulster) flags
- E) If flags are to fly they would be paramilitary flags



As a proud predominantly Unionist Community, the feedback was a clear message that if flags are to fly they should be Union flags (32%), followed closely by the view that residents should fly their own flag (27%); thus reflecting the tolerance of residents and support for people to have their own rights and responsibilities respected. Interestingly, of the minority who were in favour of paramilitary flags in previous responses, when faced with a choice of which flags should fly, only 1% chose paramilitary flags as their first preference.

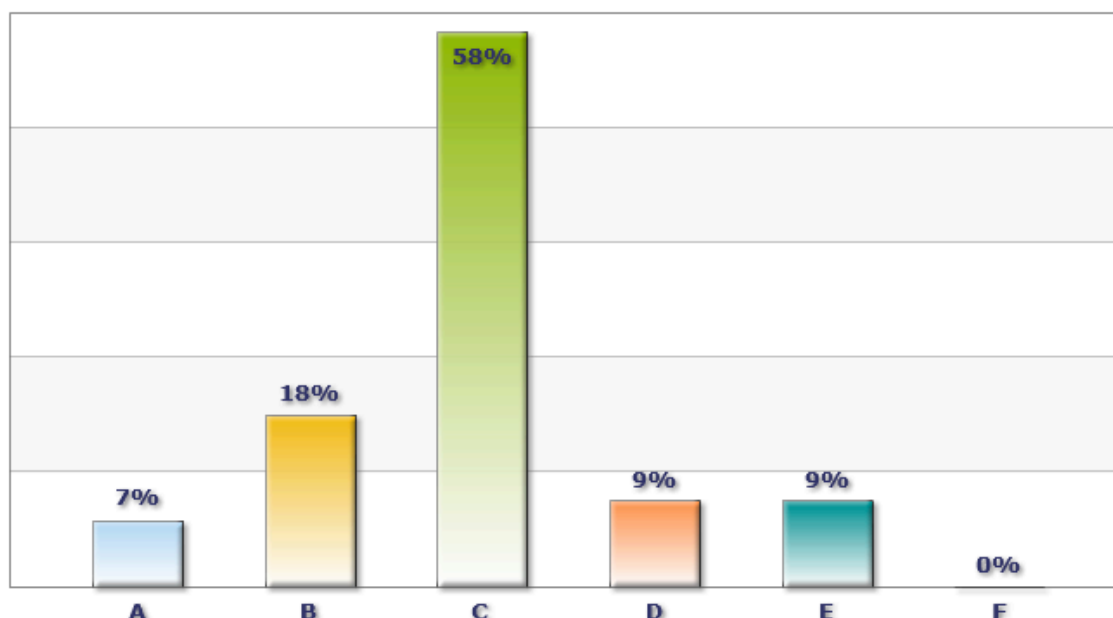
Comments included:

- *Fly whatever flag you want to outside your own house, it's up to each person.*
- *Flying the Union flag in a respectful and well maintained way shows the respect we should have for the people who gave their lives and fought for their country.*

7. Who should take the lead in resolving this issue regarding flags?



- A) Council Staff
- B) Councillors
- C) The PSNI
- D) Politicians
- E) OFMDFM
- F) Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- G) Other - please state on your comment sheet and put in the box



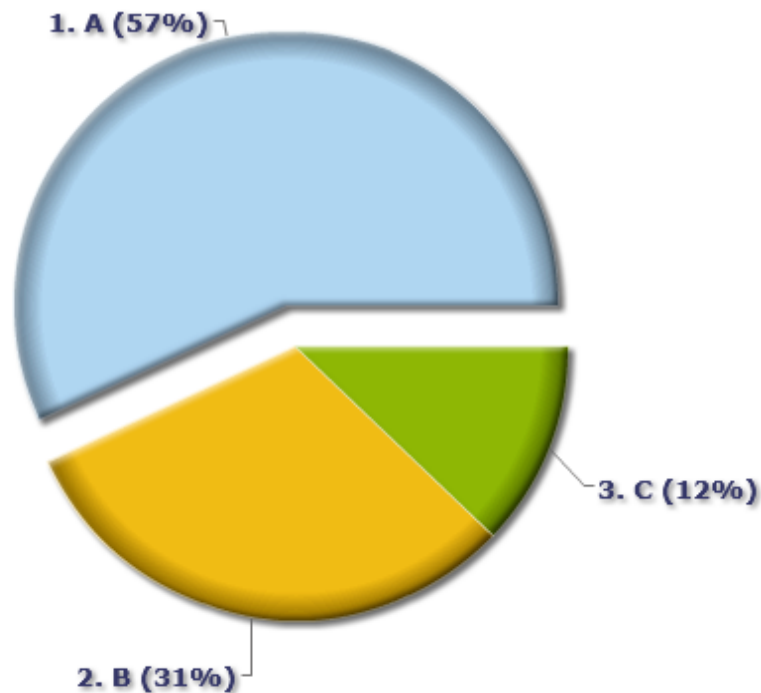
A very clear majority view (58%) that the PSNI should take the lead in removing the flags causing intimidation. With residents clearly viewing the PSNI as the main provider of safety and protection, and keen for them to police communities. This view on the PSNI also reflects the directive of the government flag protocol, which states that when the issue around flags is contentious, then the PSNI should take the lead. Next at 18% is the view that Councillors should lead. Reflecting the view that residents need protection and reassurance from the PSNI, Council Officers and Councillors.

Comments included:

- *Please councillors, police and politicians stop passing the buck and work together.*
- *Why are the PSNI and politicians running scared on this issue?*
- *Is it any wonder that the paramilitaries have so much power? As people contact them when the police don't uphold the law!*
- *The new facilities need to be looked after.*
- *Police response time must be better or do we wait until there is a major incident, such as the facilities burnt down? A death?*
- *Please keep us safe.*
- *If the police can't protect people - then who can?*

8. Do you think that there should be a Clandeboyne bonfire?

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) Unsure



The majority of the community at 57% would like a bonfire to continue in the Clandeboyne area, with 31% saying 'no' and the remaining 12% unsure. Based on the comments from the room and the feedback in written form, it would seem that the safety of the bonfire and the degree of anti-social behaviour can be what makes residents feel uncertain or opposed to it - a safe, well kept and anti-social behaviour free site may increase the residents interest in the bonfire.

Comments included:

- *I do want there to be a bonfire, but I don't want it to be big.*
- *There should be no alcohol and no drugs.*
- *I want a safe bonfire.*
- *The kids love the collecting and all, I get that, but if I'd only go to it and bring my kids if it's Clandeboyne people running it.*
- *If bonfires cause this much worry and fear, then we shouldn't have one.*

9. Do you think that the tyres should be removed from Clandeboyne bonfire site?

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) Unsure



The highest majority with 93% being in favour of the tyres being removed from the bonfire site. There are clear concerns about the toxic nature of the tyres and the reasons why they were dumped.

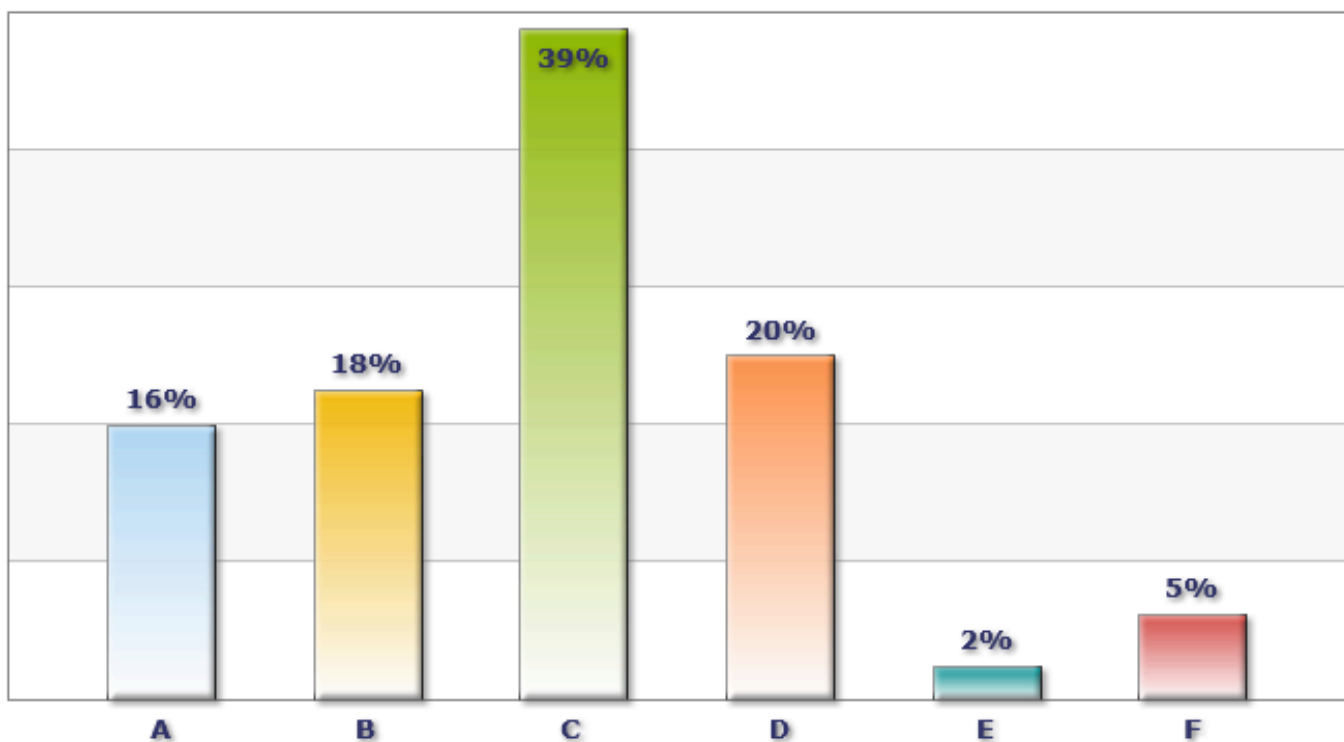
Comments included:

- *The tyres have been turned into a den and young people are being given the opportunity to gather behind them for drinking and other anti-social behaviour.*
- *I am more concerned about the young people who are causing anti-social behaviour.*
- *As the tyre dealers have to pay for the tyres to be taken away and dumped, it is cheaper for them to give the tyres away, there should be some kind of warning issued to the tyre dealers that fines will be applied for not disposing of tyres.*
- *The tyres create a shield for young people to do what they want, and the PSNI just drive past and look from a distance, but don't come and look behind it.*
- *Concerned about the group of young lads and girls at weekends drinking and destroying the playpark.*
- *It's not just our own (Clandeboyne) kids, there are others from other areas.*

10. Who should take the lead in resolving this issue regarding tyres at the Clondeboye bonfire site?



- A) Council Staff
- B) Councillors
- C) The PSNI
- D) The Department of the Environment
- E) Politicians
- F) OFMDFM
- G) Other - please state on your comment sheet and put in the box



Again the most popular view is that the PSNI should take the lead at 39% of responses. Followed by 20% that the DOE should be lead and a further 18% with the view that Councillors should take a lead. The 'other' option, which could have been any other group/organisation to take the lead such as the community itself - was not selected by anyone.

Comments included:

- *I am very concerned about the crowds of young people that are openly drinking at the bonfire and are not being moved on or challenged by PSNI.*
- *My concern is the anti-social behaviour at the park and the bonfire. I refuse to let my 6 year old child out to play when the young people are drinking alcohol, swearing and urinating in public. They seem to have no regard for the police or for residents.*

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The message from the residents of Clandeboyne is clear, and unequivocal: the people of the Clandeboyne community do not want to feel fear, intimidation or be controlled - they want to feel safe and secure in their community. They want their PUL community culture, heritage and identity to be shared in a respectful and inclusive manner.

They are asking for the paramilitary flags to be removed, and replaced by Union flags and that the PSNI should take the lead in this process. Additionally that tyres also should be removed, again by the PSNI as lead.

PSNI Chief Constable George Hamilton, when interviewed on 28th May, stated the following when discussing policing in communities, especially regarding groups seeking to take control of areas using fear and intimidation.

“The public need to have confidence that when they need the police service to be there for them in their hour of need, we are not so stretched and we are not at such a crisis point that we won’t be able to be there to help them, to keep them safe.”

“We (PSNI) are doing a huge amount of work with community representatives to reduce the vulnerability of young people drifting in that (joining various groupings) direction, through our neighbourhood teams.”

The request of the residents of Clandeboyne is that statutory organisations such as the PSNI and others, undertake their roles and responsibilities in their entirety; to reassure residents and keep them safe. Also that Ards and North Down Council’s policy on Cultural Expression is implemented in a way which achieves its aim of *maintaining and developing goodwill*, and that the clear messages from residents are valued and used to inform decisions about the Clandeboyne community - that the practice to date regarding the 11th of July celebrations, has worked very well and should continue in this area which overflowed with goodwill, community spirit and cohesion before these recent developments. Recognising and valuing what Clandeboyne residents have achieved to date in partnership with Council, elected representatives and others, and their hopes to continue to build on this in future - for the benefit of all.



Annex 1 - Letter from Clandeboyne School Principal

Good afternoon,

17th April 2015

I am emailing to voice my concern over an issue which has arisen in the Clandeboyne area over the past number of weeks.

This afternoon I stood outside a family home to show respect to the family of Adam Owens, a former pupil of Clandeboyne Primary School. Hundreds of young people, some of whom were taken ill with grief and had medical attention at the scene, followed Adam's coffin as it left his mother's home.

As we stood watching this heart-breaking scene UDA flags blew in the wind. Why? Are these not illegal symbols? I have had parents expressing concern about these flags as this is not a true representation of who lives or contributes to life in the Clandeboyne area.

As someone who is working to develop the young people in this area and who is currently helping to research and target under-achievement and lack of aspiration in the young boys of this area, it angers, frustrates and saddens me that these symbols are allowed to be flown in an area which is showing signs of positivity and improvement. It is my understanding that since the opening of the new Clandeboyne playground, property prices have increased and there has been a quick turnaround time on rentals. Pupil numbers at Clandeboyne Primary School are increasing on a weekly basis with numbers going from 200 when I arrived in September 2013 to 267 in September 2015.

The Clandeboyne community is a caring, collaborative people who are looking for a positive, inclusive future for their children and grandchildren. I would now ask that political representatives demonstrate their support for this and look forward to a response regarding the removal of these flags.

Regards

Julie Thomas
Principal

Clandeboyne Primary School

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