

UNIVERSITY PLACES:
The Ulster University
Magee campus in Derry



Derry people should demand more from their elected representatives

A SURVEY published last week revealed that Derry was the most affordable city in which to live in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Sounds good, until you realise that this is because the city is failing to keep its young people and to attract others to live there.

Derry is a great place, an ideal city break destination, compact yet packed with history and a positive vibrancy which hints at its promise, perfectly located as the gateway to Donegal and at the end of the Causeway Coastal route.

The city holds the key to economic prosperity for the entire north west region, but the lamentable absence of a coherent executive-led strategy to address the specific challenges faced by the region has ensured Derry has yet to fully realise its potential.

The infrastructure deficit is beginning to be addressed through the A6 road dualing programme set to be completed next year, though there are no plans for the Glenshane section, constituting more than a quarter of the entire road, to be transformed to dual carriageway. Consequently, Derry will remain the only city on the island not connected to another city by motorway or dual carriageway, a scandalous situation in 2021.

Planning objections have plagued the A5 project and may have fatally wounded it. Nicola Mallon as minister could yet decide that half a loaf is better than none and seek to prioritise bypasses for Strabane and Omagh to get something moving 14 years after the executive first agreed to proceed with the ill-fated plan.

The closure of the Derry-Portadown rail route in 1965 removed a direct connection from the north west to Dublin. Reopening this line would facilitate direct public transport between the region and Dublin and could form part of a new rail network across a north west region long starved of infrastructural investment.

Derry needs an injection not just of cash but of people. It should be the Galway of the north, itself a city in which 1 in 5 residents are students. Derry has

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the lowest higher education provision of the 15 largest towns and cities with degree-granting institutions across the island. Sligo has a similar number of undergraduate students as Derry in spite of a fraction of the latter's population.

The relationship between Derry and Ulster University remains one of love if not unrequited, then certainly far from fully reciprocated. The attentions of the university's authorities remain firmly fixed on its new Belfast campus. They have failed to significantly increase student numbers at Magee to the initial target figure of almost 10,000 (which it has now reduced to 6,000) thereby fuelling the campaign for a new stand-alone university in the city.

The City Deal announced last year provided an injection of cash from Westminster that will be matched by Stormont, though it is more than ironic that Ulster University stands to benefit significantly from the deal as it is poised to be the delivery partner for the research, technology and digital elements of the plan.

Prominent local business figures, such as

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Brendan Duddy, have publicly slammed Invest NI for failing to prioritise and set targets for investment in the city. Yet the fact that Diane Dodds as economy minister proclaimed her unhappiness at 850 undergraduate places being moved from Jordanstown to Derry's Magee campus (instead of Coleraine) earlier this year confirms what was already known. Political unionism does not see any political or electoral merit in giving priority to helping the city address its many challenges. The likelihood of the solitary unionist MLA in Foyle losing his seat within the next decade will mean that Derry's people will have to rely on the nationalist parties to not only articulate its case but deliver as well.

The uncomfortable truth is that, more than two decades on from the onset of devolution, Derry has yet to receive the dividend it should have expected.

Earlier this month, the local council united to call on Stormont to deliver on promises made to the region in the New Decade, New Approach deal. Yet the politicians speaking out angrily about the city's continued neglect by Stormont are from the very same parties who sit around Stormont's executive table. This is the city, after all, of two former deputy first ministers and the current SDLP leader. It is within the remit of local politicians to raise the cap on university places which could help address enrolment at Magee, particularly if it was treated as a political priority by both nationalist parties.

Derry's struggles are rooted both in the paucity of vision and delivery deficit that characterises Stormont politics.

There is nothing emerging from Stormont to remotely compare with the Republic's 'Project Ireland 2040' masterplan. This strategic document sets out how the state will invest in regional cities – Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford – to counterbalance the growth of Dublin. This will require commitments to be delivered upon in terms of housing, regeneration and employment – as well as infrastructure.

It is long since time Derry people demanded more from their politicians.

ON THIS DAY

AUGUST 16 1971

Internment Protest

A PRESBYTERIAN minister from Dublin was one of four Protestants who spoke at a Civil Rights meeting in Leeson Street, Falls Road, Belfast yesterday at which a call was made to the people to take part in a civil disobedience campaign by refusing to pay rent and rates.

Mr Paddy Devlin, MP said the people had reached the stage where they could take no more. They had suffered fifty years of oppression under the Stormont government, the RUC and the B Specials and now the British Army had come in an effort to crush the minority underfoot.

Rev Terence McCaughey, a Presbyterian chaplain in Trinity College, Dublin said that 'internment had become a bloody farce. Its introduction had merely exposed Stormont for the nasty thing it was. Innocent people, including members of the Civil Rights Association, had been taken from their homes and incarcerated simply because Unionism could not live with justice and reform.'

Priests Save RUC Man

PRIESTS went to the rescue of an RUC man when he was attacked by an angry crowd in Derry city last night.

Constable Daniel Barr, who was stationed in Antrim and whose parents live in Rossville Street Flats in Bogside, was on a visit to his native city. Some people who got the impression that he was in the Bogside as a spy had threatened him earlier in the day. He was not wearing uniform last night when he visited his grandparents' house. A crowd attacked him and some of them were shouting, 'Lynch him'.

Three priests from St Eugene's Cathedral and an Army chaplain arrived and tried to dissuade the crowd from their actions. The constable was taken to a nearby house and his attackers then threatened to burn it if he remained there. About 11pm Constable Barr, his head completely covered, emerged from a school and was put into a car which set out to cross the border to Letterkenny Hospital. It is believed that the constable was seriously injured.

Cardinal Attacks Internment

CARDINAL Conway condemned internment without trial and called for an inquiry into allegations of brutality by security forces.

(Following the disarming of the RUC in 1970 Nationalist politicians had urged young Catholics to join the RUC and the new Ulster Defence Regiment. Now they found themselves under threat when they returned home to visit relatives. Meanwhile, nationalist anger at internment was being channelled into a new wave of civil rights protests across the north while a campaign of civil disobedience attracted widespread support. For the Unionist government it was the beginning of the end.)

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