

Going to the polls 2011

Area profile:— Newry Town

Comprising of the wards of Ballybot, Daisy Hill, Drumalane, Drumgullion, St Mary's, St Patrick's and Windsor Hill, Newry Town returns seven councillors to Newry and Mourne's 30 seat chamber.

With an electorate of about 13,000 (2005) and a total population of over 18,000 (2001 Census) the Newry Town area has a religious breakdown of roughly 91 per cent Catholic to eight per cent Protestant.

In the 2005 council election, Newry Town returned Jack Patterson (IND), Charlie Casey (SF), John McArdle (SDLP), Marian O'Reilly (SF), Brendan Curran (SF), Frank Feely (SDLP) and Gary Stokes (SDLP).



Point parking

Parking charges are bad for town centres according to Crotlieve election candidate Bonnie Anley (Green). This policy actually encourages people to leave their locality and opt for the free or discounted car-parking facilities provided by large multinational supermarkets," she said. "This policy is also a slap in the face to those who are trying to develop the appeal of seaside towns, such as Warrenpoint, to visitors and tourists. If these proposals had any legitimacy, the funds raised in each town would be ring-fenced for that town to improve road quality, to widen pedestrian access, to revise and improve town traffic management and to provide extra parking spaces in strategic locations."

What Newry needs



Conor Patterson. 10W42N200



Newry Town Hall. 10W17N139

With the May 5 council elections just weeks away, the *Newry Reporter* spoke to Dr Conor Patterson, the president of Newry Chamber of Commerce and Trade about some of the major issues facing Newry.

Southern Relief Road

All stakeholders in Newry believe the Southern Relief Road is important. With the development we need in the future, will come an increased demand on infrastructure through increased movement of people and traffic.

If you want to open up the Albert Basin and the southern flank of Newry it needs to be accessible and the infrastructure we have in Newry, in a valley where space is limited and with infrastructure that was built in a different era in a different sort of economy, it now needs further

improvement. We also have Warrenpoint harbour – that gives us huge potential in terms of the future development of export led industry and inward investment. But you need to be able to access the port and not face congestion in Newry. For Warrenpoint harbour to be what it can be, for the Albert Basin to be what it can be and for the southern flank of Newry to be what it can be then the Southern Relief Road is essential.

Facilities

The urban area of Newry needs to be fit to meet the demands on its infrastructure and the demands on its services that it is providing there because more people will seek to access them from a much larger hinterland than ever before. Newry hasn't had the investment in it that is required for it to fulfil its potential. These things take time. The infrastructure had to be addressed to improve connectivity between the North and the South. And to some extent Newry benefited from that by coincidence. But the actual investment in lifestyle enhancement hasn't followed and it needs to. We need a hospital and

health facilities that acknowledge the importance of Newry as a service centre. But to attract the senior medics to work there the place needs to be attractive to live in. We have much to offer – we have two of Northern Ireland's five areas of outstanding natural beauty but they are underdeveloped. There needs to be the facilities in Newry as the gateway to these areas. It needs to have a public realm that is fit for purpose and currently it isn't. The waterways in Newry are a sight of, at times, dereliction. We need investment in a weir to bring the water up to a level and afterwards to invest in the riverbanks and also in the canal.

A good start has been made with the investments in Hill Street and Monaghan Street but our contention in Newry is that we have lots of vision but no funds.

Project delivery

The Masterplan has some very good ideas and is the product of a process of consultation like we haven't had before. The difficulty is operationalising the implementation of it. Unless we

have a costed implementation plan that might acknowledge that some of these are short and long-term priorities because these things will cost and the money has to be found.

In terms of projects not being delivered, things happen when there is uncertainty. So this risk needs to be built into the planning. I actually believe there is quite strong consensus across the political community as regards what Newry and Mourne needs. The challenge is to ensure that whoever gets elected transmits that message effectively and that we have a strategy to maximise investment from the government and the private sector.

Unemployment / emigration

Every large business at some stage was a very small micro enterprise that grew. So in the pool of businesses that we help start there is a chance of large-scale growth. But even smaller businesses that are only creating three or four jobs – they are still creating wealth and making a contribution. So every business of any size is important.

We have an engaged partnership of chamber, council, statutory bodies, community voluntary sector, which I think is unparalleled but we do not have resources so we are trying to do that. The Invest NI investment at Carnbane is evidence that the government is now recognising what Newry has in terms of entrepreneurship and the contribution it makes to the economy as a whole.

Emigration takes advantage of people that have marketable skills – now that could be their youth or their energy or their biceps or their knowledge but they always have to be mobile and they almost always have to be young and energetic.

What is left behind are the people who don't have the skills. That is the biggest challenge. The knowledge-based economy is important – but what does that do for the people who are left behind?

The real step change that will transform this economy will have to come from foreign direct investment and probably the best way of doing that is through corporation tax.

But we need a mature political class to face up to the challenge that this presents in terms of the trade off (with the block grant).

Money

Mayor Mick Murphy has said that the return of €98,000 to the council from the DOE is much welcomed and will be put to good use. "I welcome the announcement by Minister Edwin Poots and I can assure the ratepayers of Newry and Mourne that this will be put to good use in enabling the council to continue delivering a quality to our citizens," he said.

Candidate

Rostrevor native Jarlath Tinnelly will contest the Crotlieve council election on May 5, standing on an Independent platform. "As an Independent, I can give decisive leadership answerable only to the electorate," he said. "Only an independent can keep that commitment." Mr Tinnelly has said that the time for complaining is over and that elected representatives need to focus on solutions. "We don't need our elected officials to moan about it," he said. "What we need in local government is a positive approach to these problems, more action less talk. I am a doer, not a talker."