**Paul Mullan interview notes**

CHANGED VERSION

Met with Jeffrey Dudgeon 8 May 2019

Report on the statues.

East wing Exhibition. Out of that came the idea of Suzanne Wylie’s Belfast Story [now in the City Deal with an £80m budget].

The political composition of the council has changed over the years, Alliance became pivotal, the DUP were in yielding mode, the UU were more traditional and less yielding; the DUP were always deal hungry.

The flag issue came into it quite heavily. When the compromises were done I was sometimes involved, Lee Reynolds was the real wheeler and dealer. SF were spooked by the recent statues thing because that was a deal done without them. There was an inside and outside bit of work done.

I had wanted a blitz memorial and Michael Long felt that could not be allowed without getting the Unionists to agree a new [outdoor] statues policy. So he killed off the Diversity Working Group to block off my Blitz memorial. I should have made more of it ‘Alliance kills off ‘Diversity Working Group’. I succeeded in getting a Historic Working Group out of the pieces of the Diversity Working Group but Alliance killed that off as well.

I got the blitz memorial through by gambling on a vote. Alliance in the event abstained and I won. The statues issue has not been resolved with SF not happy and looking for a legal opinion on the decision. The blitz memorial will go into Cathedral Gardens. Long had wanted to use it as a brokering issue between Unionists and Nationalists, but it is not a U or N issue. It is now an emerging capital project which means it has got on the first critical council step.

The Decade work in the Council all went very well. The only issue was with President Higgins attendance [and it was his choice to pull out – I had my name down to go].

I chaired the Diversity Working Group and everything went through that. I remember being addressed by the DFA and that went well. It is all about balancing, one for you and one for us. SF accept balance for now. They have got funding for the James Connolly Museum and the Roddy McCorley. They were annoyed over the statues. It is balance and not kind liberalism. But most people are now happy to go with it all.

The stained glass windows was another series of actions. They proliferated until there was no space left. The left hand corridor are all progressive issues and the right hand corner is more Unionist. There has been a LGBT window agreed. There has also been [investment fund] money for Orange Hall refurbishments like Sandy Row and Ballynafeigh, and Gaelic clubs. That reflects the state of the city now.

I don’t think there will be much about the setting up of the NI state for various reasons. When Michael Long killed off the diversity group those matters went to the Good Relations group and there is less politics there [and non-councillors].

The key to things now is that the politics allows for shared benefits and the council officials help to make that happen. But in the future who knows there would be different pressures. So at the moment things are easy for them as there is no overall control and a spirit of reasonableness around.

Any majority losing power finds it hard and tries to hang on. As the next generation comes along it gets very practical and that suits the practical party – the DUP. And SF they are very military in their organisation. The Alliance party are not very historical. It will be interesting to see how the new central group will operate. Too many of them do not like history as they see it as bad and having caused the past troubles, and because they are forward thinking in their own minds it just does not figure.

The Unionist story has been museumised to a great degree [in the east wing exhibition space]. The agreement was that there would only be one Union Flag, albeit in a glass case upstairs, and I argued for the Civil Defence Flag above the blitz memorial commemorating the 40 or so Civil Defence workers killed. That now is the only one left.

You can do deals. That is the essence of this place. You cannot boycott it. That is how it is all structured. The officials know that and they are very good.