

I WANT TO START WITH A STORY. SO PLEASE FORGIVE ME FOR STARTING IN THE LAND OF MY ANCESTORS BEFORE MOVING NEARER HOME.

IN 1977 A STUDY ENTITLED 'BELFAST AREAS OF SPECIAL NEED' FOUND THAT THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS WERE MORE ACUTE THAN PRETTY WELL ANY OTHER EUROPEAN CITY THAN NAPLES.

SO WHEN I TOOK OVER RESPONSIBILITY FOR BELFAST IN 1985 FROM CHRIS PATTEN, I DECIDED TO TWIN BELFAST WITH NAPLES. AFTER A CHAOTIC MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CITY OF NAPLES, THE COMMUNE AND THE REGIONE, ALL 35 OF THEM WITH DIFFERING OPINIONS, I ASKED THE MAYOR FOR ONE PIECE OF ADVICE I COULD TAKE BACK TO BELFAST.

HE SAID: 'NAPLES IS A CITY FULL OF SH.T BUT IN IT FLOAT SOME DIAMONDS. THE QUESTION IS HOW TO INCREASE THE DIAMONDS AND REDUCE THE SH.T.'

SO I WENT BACK TO BELFAST TO LOOK FOR SOME DIAMONDS!

BELFAST AND BRISTOL ARE ASTONISHINGLY SIMILAR AND ASTONISHINGLY DIFFERENT. THEY ARE TWO OF THE GREAT CITIES ON WHICH THE BRITISH EMPIRE WAS FOUNDED AND PROSPERED. AS THEY WERE SUCCESSFUL BRITAIN WAS SUCCESSFUL. WHEN THEY SUFFERED, BRITAIN SUFFERED LIKEWISE.

IN THE MIDDLE AGES BRISTOL GREW ON THE BACK OF THE WOOL AND WINE TRADE. HENRY III GAVE BRISTOLIANS THE RIGHT TO LIVE IN AND TRADE FROM DUBLIN. IN THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURY BRISTOL BECAME THE CENTRE OF THE SLAVE TRADE AND THROUGH THE TRIANGULAR SLAVE TRADE THE DEMAND FOR CHEAP BRASS CAUSED A BOOM IN MANUFACTURING.

WHEN EDMUND BURKE, A DUBLINER, WAS ELECTED AS MEMBER FOR BRISTOL IN 1774 HE CAMPAIGNED ON FREE TRADE, CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION AND THE RIGHTS OF AMERICAN COLONISTS. BUT HE DETESTED THE SLAVE TRADE, SUPPORTED POPULAR CAUSES AND WAS EJECTED IN 1780. IF PITT THE YOUNGER HAD LISTENED

TO EDMUND BURKE'S PLEAS FOR RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN IRELAND THE BITTERNESS, MISERY AND VIOLENCE THAT LED IRELAND TO PARTITION, PERDITION AND HOME RULE WOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED.

IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY THE CITY WENT INTO ECONOMIC DECLINE. THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, THE GROWTH OF THE MANUFACTURING POWER HOUSES OF THE NORTH AND MIDLANDS SIDELINED BRISTOL. ALTHOUGH THE POPULATION INCREASED, SO DID POVERTY. HOWEVER, THE PORT CONTINUED TO FLOURISH, ALL THE MORE SO WITH THE ARRIVAL OF ISAMBARD KINGDOM BRUNEL AND WITH HIM THE BUILDING OF THE GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY, THE PIONEERING IRON STEAM SHIPS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CLIFTON SUSPENSION BRIDGE, CHOCOLATE, SOAP, COTTON AND PORT TOOK THE PLACE OF COPPER, BRASS AND GLASS AND BRISTOL ONCE AGAIN ESTABLISHED ITS SELF-CONFIDENCE AND IMPORTANCE.

THE CITY BECAME ONE OF THE CENTRES OF THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY (AS DID BELFAST) AND ON ITS BACK CAME PAPER AND ENGINEERING. THE BRISTOL AEROSPACE COMPANY BUILT THE

RAF'S FIRST FIGHTER IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR. J S FRY STARTED MAKING CHOCOLATES, THE PORT AND SHERRY BUSINESS REVIVED. BRISTOL FOUNDED A UNIVERSITY. IT WAS A RADICAL, PROGRESSIVE CITY SUPPORTED BY LARGE CHARITABLE FOUNDATIONS.

ONCE MORE CAME THE DARK TIMES. THE CITY CENTRE WAS BADLY BOMBED IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR (AS WAS BELFAST). OVER 1300 PEOPLE LOST THEIR LIVES, 100,000 BUILDINGS WERE DAMAGED, 3000 BEYOND REPAIR. THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY WITHERED, THE AEROSPACE INDUSTRY STRUGGLED TO MOVE FROM FIGHTERS TO COMMERCIAL AIRLINERS. THE CITY CENTRE WAS POCKMARKED WITH CHEAP BRUTALIST TOWER BLOCKS AND THE ROADS CATERED FOR CARS NOT RESIDENTS OR SHOPPERS.

TOWARDS THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY THE WORM TURNED AGAIN. THE REMOVAL OF THE DOCKS DOWNSTREAM TO AVONMOUTH CREATED AN OPPORTUNITY TO REGENERATE THE BRISTOL DOCKLANDS THROUGH THE FORMATION OF AN URBAN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (AS HAPPENED IN BELFAST). THE

REFURBISHMENT OF THE CITY CENTRE ATTRACTED NEW SERVICE INDUSTRIES.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY BRISTOL AND ITS SUBURBS, ITS RURAL HINTERLAND AND ITS CENTRE FACE NEW CHALLENGES. DESPITE THE SUCCESS OF CENTRAL AND INNER CITY REGENERATION SCHEMES SUCH AS CANON'S WHARF AND THE AT-BRISTOL PLANETARIUM, THERE ARE THREATS TO ITS CORE FROM ONLINE SHOPPING, EDGE-OF-CITY RETAIL AND BUSINESS PARKS.

ALTHOUGH IT BOASTS ONE OF THE MOST PRODUCTIVE BIG CITY ECONOMIES IN THE UK, AND IS RESPECTED FOR ITS STRENGTHS IN ADVANCED MANUFACTURING AND AEROSPACE, IT FACES INCREASED COMPETITION FROM OTHER CITIES IN THE UK, EUROPE AND GLOBALLY. THAT COMPETITION IS FIERCE AND BRISTOL'S MANUFACTURING AND INDUSTRIAL BASE HAS BECOME TOO NARROW. IT IS NOT REBALANCING FAST ENOUGH AND MUST PROGRESS EVER FASTER ITS INNOVATION AGENDA AND THE USE OF 3 AND 4D TECHNOLOGIES FOR NEW MANUFACTURING ENTREPRENEURS.

SO WHERE ARE THE DIAMONDS IN BRISTOL'S TIARA? WHAT IS THE POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE THAT CAN ENSURE THAT BRISTOL'S GLORY IS IN FRONT RATHER THAN BEHIND. HOW CAN BRISTOL BECOME ONE OF THE ALPHA PLUS WORLD CLASS CITIES? WHAT DOES THAT MEAN, WHAT DOES IT REQUIRE AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

BELFAST IS SMALLER THAN BRISTOL AND HAS GROWN MORE SLOWLY OVER THE LAST FIFTY YEARS. AS BRISTOL IS THE MAJOR CITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND, SO BELFAST DOMINATES THE NORTH OF IRELAND. ON THE SURFACE THERE ARE GREAT SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THEM, THEIR HISTORIES AND THEIR INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION BUT THEY ARE IN MANY RESPECTS AS DIFFERENT AS CHALK AND CHEESE.

BELFAST WAS BORN OUT OF THE SCOTS AND ENGLISH PLANTATIONS OF ULSTER IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES. IT WAS A PROTESTANT CITY THAT IN 1784 HAD A CATHOLIC POPULATION OF AROUND 400. BY 1866 WITH THE ONSET

OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION THE CATHOLIC POPULATION ROSE TO OVER 45,000. THEY BROUGHT THEIR IRISH NATIONALISM WITH THEM. CONDITIONS WERE SQUALID, OVERCROWDED AND UNSANITARY. CHOLERA AND TUBERCULOSIS WERE COMMON.

AS THE TWO COMMUNITIES DEVELOPED SEPARATELY AND DIVERSELY, SO VIOLENCE BECAME ENDEMIC. 1907 SAW THE POLICE MUTINY AND 10000 DOCK WORKERS ON STRIKE. BETWEEN 1920 –1922 MAJOR SECTARIAN VIOLENCE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF 465 CIVILIANS, MOSTLY CATHOLICS. THOUSANDS FLED TO GLASGOW AND DUBLIN. BUT MEANWHILE THE SHIPYARDS FLOURISHED. HARLAND AND WOLFF BECAME THE BIGGEST SHIPYARD IN THE WORLD. BELFAST WAS THE LINENOPOLIS OF THE GLOBE. THE UPS AND DOWNS OF THE ECONOMIC CYCLE WERE MARKED BY UNEASY PEACE FOLLOWED BY VICIOUS SECTARIAN RIOTING.

THE WAR WAS HARD ON BELFAST – OVER 1000 KILLED IN ONE NIGHT'S BLITZ – THE AFTERMATH WORSE, THE LINEN AND SHIP BUILDING INDUSTRIES DECLINED. BUT REAL HORROR WAS TO FOLLOW. AT THE END OF THE 60'S THE CITY ERUPTED INTO A

VIOLENCE WHICH WAS TO LAST FOR THE NEXT 25 YEARS. BELFAST WAS SUBJECTED TO A TERRORIST CAMPAIGN THAT LEFT THE CITY DESOLATE. A TINY ENCLAVE OF NORMALITY IN THE CENTRE WAS KEPT ALIVE BY M & S, BOOTS, AND ANDERSON & MCCAULEY, A DEPARTMENT STORE. IT WAS PROTECTED BY A 12FT HIGH METAL FENCE TOPPED WITH BARBED WIRE AND INTERSPERSED WITH GATES WHERE THE SHOPPERS WERE SEARCHED.

NOTHING LASTS FOREVER. THE IRA LEADERS WERE BECOMING OLDER AND SLIGHTLY WISER. IT WAS CLEAR 'THAT WITH THE ARMALITE IN THIS HAND AND THE BALLOT BOX IN THIS HAND', THEY WERE NOT GOING TO TAKE POWER IN IRELAND. AT THE END OF THE 1980S BELFAST'S CITY CENTRE, DESPITE FIREBOMBINGS AND THE OCCASIONAL ATROCITY, ROSE FROM THE DEAD. THE FORMATION OF THE LAGANSIDE CORPORATION CLEANED UP THE RIVER. ENCOURAGED BY THE GOVERNMENT THE PRIVATE SECTOR STARTED CONSTRUCTING HOMES AND HOTELS. RESTAURANTS FLOURISHED, NIGHT LIFE RETURNED AND THE TERRORISTS ON BOTH SIDES SLUNK BACK TO THEIR GHETTOS WHERE THEY CONTINUED TO COW AND DOMINATE THEIR SUBJECT COMMUNITIES.

THE OPENING OF THE LARGEST SHOPPING COMPLEX IN IRELAND, CASTLE COURT, BUILT OUT OF GLASS AND METAL WAS A STATEMENT OF THE CITY'S DETERMINATION TO RETURN TO NORMALITY. THE 1991 BELFAST FESTIVAL GAVE THE CITIZENS OF ALL CREEDS, CLASSES AND BELIEFS A CHANCE TO ENJOY THEMSELVES IN A CITY WHICH HAD ALWAYS HAD MUSIC AND LAUGHTER IN GREATER ABUNDANCE THAN BOMBS, BLASTS AND TEARS.

THE ENORMOUS SUCCESS OF THE CITY'S DOCKLANDS REGENERATION SCHEME, KNOWN AS LAGANSIDE, HAS BEEN AN ECONOMIC DRIVER FOR THE CITY AND AN IMPORTANT ATTRACTION FOR VISITORS AND CITIZENS ALIKE. IN 1989 I COMMITTED THE UK GOVERNMENT TO AN ALLOCATION TO LAGANSIDE OF £200 MILLION INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING OVER FIVE YEARS ON THE PROMISE OF AN ESTIMATED RATIO OF 1 TO 3 PUBLIC TO PRIVATE INVESTMENT. AN OECD AUDIT 20 YEARS LATER REVEALED THAT THE PUBLIC SECTOR HAD INVESTED £250 MILLION OVER TEN YEARS AND THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR HAD INVESTED £1.3BILLION OVER 20 YEARS. THE TITANIC MUSEUM AND

ITS RELATED DEVELOPMENT IS ONE OF BELFAST'S 20 CARAT DIAMONDS NOT LEAST AS IT'S DIAMOND –SHAPED!

AFTER THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT OF 1998 BRITISH MINISTERS FLEW BACK TO LONDON. AT STORMONT A DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATION TOOK CONTROL AND THE CITY APPEARED TO HAVE PUT ITS PAST BEHIND IT. BUT PROBLEMS REMAINED AND IN SOME AREAS INTENSIFIED.

SO WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR THESE TWO GREAT CITIES WHO THOUGH COMING FROM DIFFERING ROOTS HAVE ENDED UP IN A VERY SIMILAR PLACE?

AT THE START OF THIS TALK I SPOKE ABOUT GROWING DIAMONDS AS THE KEY TO SUCCESS. BOTH BRISTOL AND BELFAST NOW HAVE MANY NECKLACES. WORLD CLASS UNIVERSITIES, ADVANCED MANUFACTURING, VIBRANT CITY CENTRES, GROWING POPULATIONS, WONDERFUL BUILDINGS, CULTURE, MUSIC, SPORT, THEATRES, HOTELS, BARS. THE LIST IS FAR FROM EXHAUSTIVE.

TO PROSPER FROM THIS POINT ON MODERN CITIES REQUIRE A COMPLEX MATRIX OF SERVICES, INSTITUTIONS AND INFRASTRUCTURE. THEY REQUIRE SOPHISTICATED AND INTEGRATED PUBLIC SERVICES RUN BY DEDICATED ELECTED OFFICIALS WITH THE POWER AND AUTHORITY TO GET THINGS DONE IN A SPEEDY AND TRANSPARENT WAY.

TO ATTRACT INWARD INVESTMENT, TO ACHIEVE A BALANCED LOCAL ECONOMY, CATERING FOR BOTH LARGE AND SMALL PRIVATE ENTERPRISE THEY NEED EFFICIENT ROADS, RAIL AND AIRLINKS. THEY NEED WORLD CLASS RESEARCH CENTRES. THEY NEED TO BE SAFE AND ECLECTIC, STRETCHING THE ABILITIES OF THEIR CITIZENS TO THE LIMIT.

AT THE SUMMIT OF THEIR COMPLEX SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK THEY NEED DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP, CAPABLE OF PROJECTING AMBITION AND VISION. HOW FAR ARE BRISTOL AND BELFAST DOWN THE ROAD TO BECOMING WORLD CLASS CITIES OF THIS CENTURY?

WHAT IS A WORLD CLASS CITY? IN 2009 FORBES MAGAZINE ASKED A SERIES OF CORRESPONDENTS FOR THEIR TAKE ON WHAT PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF A CITY MATTERED TO THEM. THEY INCLUDED 'BEAUTY AT NIGHT' (FLOODLIGHTING BOMBED OUT BUILDINGS IN BELFAST CITY CENTRE), NIGHT LIFE, CHURCHES, MUSEUMS, PARKS, ZOOS, RESTAURANTS AND CAFES, BARTENDERS WHO SERVE DRINKS, BEAUTIFUL WOMEN, A JEWISH COMMUNITY, AFFORDABLE EXTENSIVE TRANSPORT, DISTINCTIVE ARCHITECTURE, IMMIGRANTS, NO SINGLE DOMINANT COMMUNITY, SPORT, ORCHESTRAS, MORE TAXI CABS THEN PEOPLE WANTING TO USE THEM, A CITY CENTRE THAT IS ALIVE DAY AND NIGHT AND WHERE PEOPLE CAN LIVE IN SAFETY AND COMFORT. WHAT IS THE POINT OF A CITY WITHOUT A HEART? AT LEAST ONE NEWSPAPER THAT WON'T GO BROKE IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS, A FEW FILTHY RICH AND FINALLY A DESTINATION CITY FOR THE POPE! OF COURSE THEY HAVE LEFT OUT A LOT, EDUCATION, HOUSING, HEALTH –THE LIST THAT MAKES UP A GREAT CITY IS ENDLESS.

I HAVE A SUGGESTION: WHY NOT MAKE A 1:500 SCALE MODEL OF OUR CITIES AS CHICAGO HAS DONE? THE COST WILL BE MORE THAN OUTWEIGHED BY THE EXCITEMENT IT WILL CREATE.

I WISH TO CONCENTRATE ON TWO SPECIFIC AREAS WHICH I BELIEVE WILL MAKE OR BREAK BELFAST AND BRISTOL. ONE IS THE ROLL OUT OF SMART CITY TECHNOLOGY AND THE SECOND IS HOW A CITY IS MANAGED BOTH POLITICALLY AND STRUCTUALLY TO COPE WITH THIS NEW REVOLUTION.

UNTIL RECENTLY, CERTAINLY UP TO 20 YEARS AGO, CITIES COMPRISED OF A MULTIPLE OF LAYERS OF HARD INFRASTRUCTURE THAT WAS AT BEST LOOSELY RELATED. BUILDINGS, ROADS, ENERGY, WATER, SEWERAGE, TELECOMMUNICATIONS WERE WITHOUT ANY MEANS OF INTERCONNECTION. THEY EXISTED IN SILOS AND WERE USED BY THE CITIZENS EITHER FOR FREE, SUCH AS ROADS, OR THROUGH USEAGE SUCH AS POWER AND COMMUNICATIONS.

ALL THIS IS CHANGING AT AN UNIMAGINABLE SPEED. THE INTERNET IS CAUSING A THIRD INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION. CITIES OF THE FUTURE NEED TO BE FAR MORE ORGANIC AND FLEXIBLE. THIS IS WHY BUILDINGS NEED TO BE ADAPTED FOR CONTINUALLY CHANGING USE. IT IS WHY ROADS CANNOT BE JUST FOR CARS, BUSES AND LORRIES BUT NEED TO BE SAFELY SHARED BY PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS, OR EVEN GIVEN TO DIFFERENT METHODS OF TRANSPORT AT DIFFERENT TIMES OF DAY.

ON TOP OF THE HARDWARE MUST BE THE CITY'S OPERATING SYSTEM...MILLIONS OF SENSORS ACTING AS NERVE ENDINGS IN THE SKIN OF THE CITY, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF SMART PHONES PROVIDING FEEDBACK ON PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOURS AND FEELINGS, FAST HIGH CAPACITY DATA COMMUNICATION NETWORKS INTERWOVEN AS A NERVOUS SYSTEM PASSING THE INFORMATION BACK AND FORTH, AND THE DATA PLATFORM WHICH COLLECTS, TRANSLATES, STORES AND ANALYSES ALL OF THIS INFORMATION.

ACCORDING TO KINETIC UK 'BRISTOL IS SET TO BECOME ONE OF THE LEADING SMART CITIES OF THE FUTURE AFTER LAUNCHING A

MULTI-MILLION POUND PROJECT TO TURN THE CITY INTO A GLOBAL INNOVATION HUB CALLED 'BRISTOL IS OPEN'.

BRISTOL HAS FORGED RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDUSTRIAL PARTNERS, AMONG THEM NEC (I MUST DECLARE AN INTEREST, I HAVE BEEN A DIRECTOR OF NEC EUROPE FOR OVER 17 YEARS) TO CREATE AN OPEN CITY PLATFORM TO MANAGE CONGESTION, WASTE MANAGEMENT, ENTERTAINMENT EVENTS, E- DEMOCRACY, ENERGY SUPPLY AND MORE. BRISTOL HAS REALLY GOT ITS ACT TOGETHER. THE UNIVERSITIES, THE CITY COUNCIL, THE MAYOR'S OFFICE, THE MAJOR COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL INTERESTS, GALVANIZED BY THE MOST SUCCESSFUL LEP IN THE COUNTRY UNDER COLIN SKELLETT, HAVE COME TOGETHER TO APPLY FOR MONEY FROM LOCAL, NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS. THEY HAVE SQUIRRELED MONEY FROM ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND SQUEEZED CASH FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

THEY HAVE A MULTI MILLION POUND BUDGET INVESTED IN A HIGH PERFORMANCE SDN SPINE THAT WILL FORM THE BACKBONE OF THE INTERNET OF THINGS WHICH WILL REVOLUTIONISE PUBLIC

SERVICES AND GIVE ENTREPRENEURS PLATFORMS TO TEST AND DEVELOP THEIR PRODUCTS.

A MONTH AGO BRISTOL WAS ONE OF THREE CITIES THAT WON CASH FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION'S HORIZON FUND IN COLLABORATION WITH SAN SEBASTIAN AND FLORENCE. BELFAST'S TRACK RECORD IN DRAWING IN SMART CITY DEVELOPMENT FUNDS IS LESS SUCCESSFUL. HOWEVER, MANY AT THE TOP OF BELFAST'S CITY COUNCIL, ITS UNIVERSITIES AND BUSINESSES HAVE 'GOT IT'. BELFAST HAS ANNOUNCED 'GREAT STEPS' THE NAME IT HAS GIVEN TO ITS RECENT IOT BID TO ADDRESS THE FRAGMENTATION OF ITS INFRASTRUCTURE.

COMPARE BRISTOL AND BELFAST. BRISTOL HAS AN ELECTED MAYOR WHOSE WEB SITE STATES HIS AMBITION TO HAVE BRISTOL AS ONE OF EUROPE'S TOP TEN CITIES WITHIN TEN YEARS. HIS SLOGAN IS 'BRISTOL MUST BE BOLD'. HE IS A LOCAL HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL ARCHITECT WHO GAVE UP HIS POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE TO STAND FOR ELECTION. HE ACTS AS A LIGHTENING ROD FOR ALL THOSE ISSUES THAT OTHERS FIND TOO HARD TO HANDLE. POOR HOUSING, TOO MUCH BUREAUCRACY, POOR

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT. HE HAS CREATED A RAINBOW CABINET FROM THE MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES. BUT HIS REAL ACHIEVEMENT IS TO SET AN AGENDA AND DRIVE STRATEGIC INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS.

BRISTOL HAS 70 COUNCILLORS AND 4 MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT. BELFAST HAS 60 COUNCILLORS AND 4 MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT. BUT WHEREAS BRISTOL HAS A COHERENT DEMOCRATIC PYRAMID WITH POWER SHARED BETWEEN VARIOUS ELECTED AND APPOINTED AUTHORITIES UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF A SINGLE ELECTED OFFICIAL, BELFAST HAS NO SUCH INTEGRATION, NO SUCH FIGUREHEAD AND ADDITIONALLY HAS A FURTHER LAYER OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION, 24 MEMBERS OF THE DEVOLVED ASSEMBLY. BOTH CITIES HAVE REMARKABLY HIGH QUALITY DEDICATED AND CREATIVE PUBLIC OFFICIALS BUT EVEN THOUGH BELFAST HAS RECENTLY GAINED INCREASED POWERS FOR ITS COUNCIL, IT REMAINS FAR HARDER TO ADVANCE AND CO-ORDINATE CROSS PARTY, CROSS DISCIPLINE INITIATIVES.

BELFAST HAS COME BACK FROM THE DEAD AND NO PRAISE IS HIGH ENOUGH FOR THE ENORMOUS PROGRESS IT HAS MADE OVER THE

LAST THIRTY YEARS DESPITE THE CHAOTIC AND SOMETIMES SELF INTERESTED LOBBYING OF OPPONENTS TO ANY IMAGINATIVE CHANGES.

SO WHERE NOW FOR THESE TWO GREAT CITIES? BOTH STILL HAVE VERY SIMILAR RESIDUAL PROBLEMS, POOR PEOPLE LIVING IN POOR HOUSING IN LARGE AREAS WITH POOR EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, HIGH LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT, DRUGS AND IN BRISTOL'S CASE INTEGRATING IMMIGRANTS, IN BELFAST'S CASE ROOTING OUT SECTARIAN AND SOMETIMES VICIOUS PARA MILITARY VIOLENCE.

BUT BOTH ARE UNRECOGNISABLE FROM WHERE THEY WERE THIRTY YEARS AGO. BRISTOL HAS THE EASIEST ROAD TO FOLLOW. IT HAS TO WORK OUT WHO FOLLOWS THE PRESENT MAYOR, HOW DOES IT DEAL WITH THE CITY OF BATH ON ITS DOORSTEP? HOW DOES IT WIDEN ITS INDUSTRIAL BASE THROUGH ATTRACTING MORE YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN INTO MANUFACTURING AND ENGINEERING? HOW DOES IT CAPITALISE ON THE ARRIVAL OF SMART TECHNOLOGIES? HOW DOES IT MAKE 3D MANUFACTURING

OPEN TO ALL PARTICULARLY TO YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS AND PARTICULARLY TO WOMEN WITH NEW PRODUCTS AND SERVICES?

THESE ARE THE CHALLENGES AND EXCITEMENTS FOR THE FUTURE. AS EDMUND BURKE, BRISTOL'S AND THE TORY'S GREATEST PHILOSOPHER ONCE SAID, 'THE ARROGANCE OF AGE MUST SUBMIT TO BE TAUGHT BY YOUTH'. BELFAST MUST FOLLOW BRISTOL BUT UNTIL THE POLITICIANS IN NORTHERN IRELAND LOOK AT CITIES LIKE BRISTOL AS AN EXAMPLE THAT THEY SHOULD EMULATE BELFAST WILL FALL BEHIND. BELFAST NEEDS A LEADER AND IT NEEDS ONE QUICK OR ELSE AS IN THE WORDS OF MAURICE CRAIG'S HAUNTING BALLAD:

'O THE BRICKS THEY WILL BLEED AND THE RAIN IT WILL WEEP

AND THE DAMP LAGAN FOG WILL THE CITY TO SLEEP

IT'S TO HELL WITH THE FUTURE AND LIVE IN THE PAST

MAY THE LORD IN HIS MERCY LOOK DOWN ON BELFAST.'

I HAVE ONE FINAL THOUGHT. I WAS MP FOR CHIPPENHAM FOR 18 YEARS AND MINISTER FOR BELFAST FOR 7 YEARS. THE TWO CITIES, BELFAST FOR WHICH I WAS RESPONSIBLE, THE OTHER BRISTOL WHICH WAS THE GIANT ON MY DOORSTEP, HAVE BOTH BEEN MASSIVE INFLUENCES ON MY POLITICAL AND BUSINESS LIFE. THE POINT OF THIS TALK IS TO SUGGEST THAT THEY HAVE SO MUCH IN COMMON AND YET SO MUCH THAT IS DIFERENT. THEY ARE COMPLIMENTARY NOT COMPETITIVE. THEY ARE BOTH ALREADY IN SO MANY WAYS WORLD CLASS CITIES.

SO WHY SHOULD THEY WORK TOGETHER? IN BELFAST'S CASE IT'S FAIRLY CLEAR: IT IS BEHIND LEADING CITIES IN THE UK AND ABROAD. IT KNOWS WHAT A SMART CITY STRATEGY SHOULD BE BUT IT IS STRUGGLING TO IMPLEMENT IT.

BRISTOL NEEDS 'FRIENDS'. THE CITIES OF THE NORTH, SCOTLAND AND THE MIDLANDS ARE ALREADY EITHER MUCH LARGER OR WORKING IN CLUSTERS. TO ATTRACT INVESTMENT AND TO GIVE ITS ENTREPRENEURS ACCESS TO MARKETS BRISTOL HAS TO MAKE SURE THAT THE SOLUTIONS IT DEVELOPS ARE REPLICABLE TO OTHER CITIES AND REGIONS IN THE UK. WITH A BROADER MARKET

REACH WITHIN THE COUNTRY THE WEST OF ENGLAND LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP WILL FACE BETTER PROSPECTS FOR ITS PLANS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

BELFAST COULD BE AN IDEAL PARTNER. IT IS NOT THREATENING IN EITHER STATUS OR RECOGNITION. IT IS FULL OF TALENT AND DESERVES TO SUCCEED. BRISTOL AND BELFAST SHOULD LOOK TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS TOGETHER, AND ANY SOLUTION THAT THEY DEVELOP WILL BENEFIT FROM BEING TRIED AND TESTED IN BOTH CITIES BEFORE THEY ARE ROLLED OUT ELSEWHERE.

IF THEY CAN COME TOGETHER AND LEARN FROM EACH OTHER'S SUCCESSES AND FAILURES, SURELY THEIR DIAMONDS WILL INCREASE AND SHINE EVEN BRIGHTER!