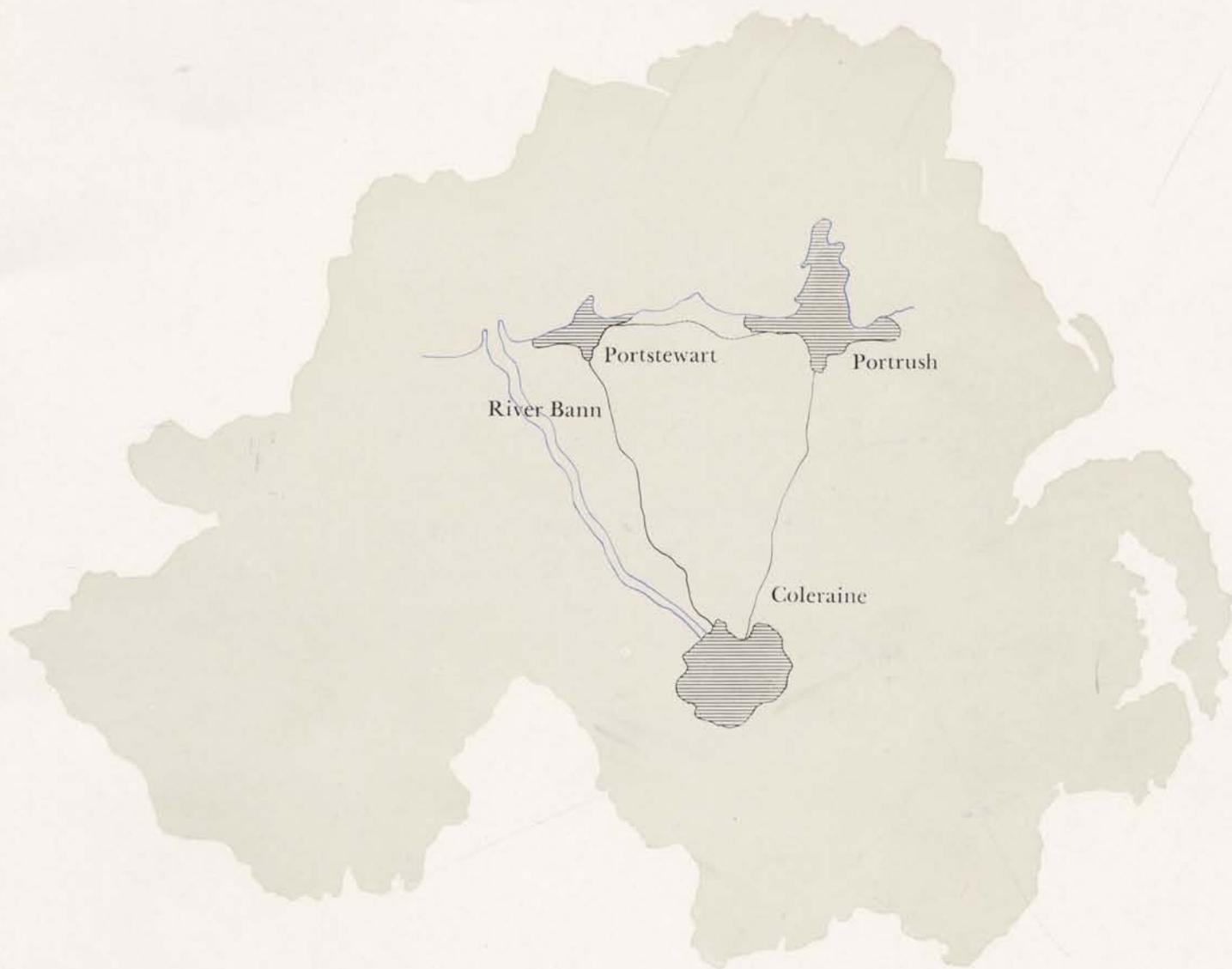


A second university for Northern Ireland



Proposals from the Coleraine/Portrush/Portstewart area

Memorandum to Her Majesty's Government in Northern Ireland outlining the proposal that the new university to be established in Ulster be sited in the Coleraine/Portrush/Portstewart area.

February 1964

In 1962 a memorandum was addressed to the Minister of Finance suggesting that, in the event of a decision being taken to establish a second university in Ulster, consideration should be given to the selection of the Coleraine/Portrush/Portstewart area as a suitable site.

At this time it was made clear by the Ministry that there was no question of any immediate decision being made.

In late 1962 a committee was formed representing the four local councils and the local Chamber of Commerce to further the task of determining whether this area would be a suitable choice as a site for the new university. Since that time other areas have made and presented their cases to the government for consideration. Examination of these representations and the facilities this area offers, has resulted in our conclusions that it is necessary and vital for all Ulster, that the facts concerning the choice of the Coleraine/Portrush/Portstewart area should be considered most fully.

It should be noted that no discussion is made whatsoever of the factors concerning the need for a second university in Ulster. This has been covered fully in recent reports by responsible bodies throughout the United Kingdom, and it is felt that in the light of this information the case is now fully established, and a decision to proceed with the construction of a new university will be made within the very near future.

This memorandum requests that the fullest consideration be given by Her Majesty's Government to the selection of the Coleraine/Portrush/Portstewart area as a site for the second university in Ulster.

Foreword

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Mayor of Coleraine

W.R. Knox CBE MM JP
Chairman,
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Chairman,
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Council

Considerable research was carried out on the factors pertaining to the selection of a suitable university site in order to assess the potential prospects of this area. In deciding upon the factors to employ in this study, use was made of the general survey in 'Returns from Universities and University/Colleges in receipt of Treasury Grants, relating to new University Institutions', university calendars, the Robbins Report, etc.

The factors chosen for discussion are as follows:

- (a) the geographical location and local amenities.
- (b) community reaction;
- (c) recreational and extra-curricular facilities;
- (d) availability of accommodation;
- (e) capital investment required and support from local authorities;
- (f) attractability of the location for staff;
- (g) the student population distribution;
- (h) availability of sites.

Each factor is discussed in the following pages.

Access to the proposed area is direct and rapid from any part of Ulster.

The beautiful countryside and seashore are renowned throughout the United Kingdom and there is no more active centre of zoological, botanical and geological interest. Apart from being a centre of tourism, this location already forms a part of the visiting area for these subjects at Queen's University.

The growth of the area as an administrative centre has increased in recent years. Work on the new County Hall at Coleraine costing over £800,000 has begun and will be completed in 1967. This will form an impressive county administrative centre, second to none in Ulster. The County Library Headquarters in Coleraine offer an outstanding service to the community at large, and on completion of the County Hall the library will be re-housed in this building. This transfer of administration to Coleraine is typical of the growth in importance of this community in the last few years.

The combined population of the three towns and the rural area supports a flourishing cultural and social life. All three towns have active and well-known amateur dramatic societies. In addition, the Portrush Musical Society stages full-scale productions of both serious and light opera, and the Coleraine Musical Society in conjunction with the Arts Council has been responsible for the promotion of many worthwhile musical evenings, introducing leading artistes to the community. Among other interests there are also field naturalists clubs, arts societies, etc.

It is felt that an urban community of this type, Portrush, Portstewart and Coleraine, having a combined population of about 20,000 and surrounded by a rural area, has a far more appropriate setting for a new university than a densely populated area. The university cultural and recreational activities can form part of the community life and be supported by it. This is exemplified by the selection of rural settings for new university sites in England.

(a)

Geographical location and local amenities

While the first consideration must be the suitability of a location for the university, it would be unrealistic to ignore the impact of the university on the area or community in which it is to be situated. There may be areas under consideration where its presence would add to existing problems of overcrowding, lack of housing facilities, etc, and where there might be lack of recognition of the natural exuberance of the student body. There are also areas where its presence would improve the well being of the entire community in a most dramatic fashion. If several possible situations are equally suitable, consideration should be given to the placement of the university in that area which will benefit most.

Bearing in mind that a major Ulster industry is tourism, the presence of a university would greatly assist this industry in the provision of added income to hoteliers in the local area during

(b)

Community reaction

the off-season. This would give them an opportunity of providing further facilities to attract a greater number of tourists and the position of the university's name associated with these towns would be invaluable. In addition, it is felt that the government is committed to a comprehensive plan of industrial development within the area covered by the Matthew Report. The siting of the new university in the Portrush/Portstewart/Coleraine area, therefore, seems to present an ideal opportunity to assist an area which lies outside any present scheme for industrial development in this part of Ulster.

In terms of the reaction of the local community to the student body, no area can be more favourable since for four months of the year it is used to, and reacts well to, the boisterous voice of youth. The reaction of the community to the possible presence of a student body has been generally one of pleasure and no university could obtain a better welcome than it would receive in this area.

Although not the major objective of university life, recreational and sporting facilities form a substantial part of the activities of any university or body of students associated with a university.

Normally, the placing of a new college would not be concomitant with the availability of a surfeit of sporting facilities. This will be the case, however, if the new university site is chosen in the area proposed.

Athletics, cricket, rugby football, soccer, hockey and badminton, all the traditional sports of university life, flourish in this area and there are ideal facilities for each of these activities. In the case of ball games, the university would require its own facilities and, as mentioned elsewhere, there is adequate acreage available to developing playing fields.

In addition, the area is renowned as a centre for golf with six courses within a radius of seven miles of Coleraine.

There is already one indoor swimming pool established in Portrush, and plans are approved for construction of a second larger pool in Coleraine. There is also fine sea bathing available on the many surrounding beaches and rock pools. The area has long been associated with other water sports such as angling and sailing from Portrush and Portstewart, and of course the Bann Rowing Club in Coleraine is one of the oldest and most respected clubs in Ireland. More recently the district has become an active centre for water skiing.

In Coleraine there is a well supported territorial unit which would prove of great assistance in establishing a university OTC.

(c) Recreational facilities

In the foundation of a new university, it is essential to bear in mind the vital need for developing and fostering the corporate life of the new institution.

Present-day thinking on this subject is, however, no longer tied

(d) Accommodation availability

to the concept of separate residential colleges or halls of residence within the university. Prominent university officials have recently advocated the provision of smaller units taking ten to twenty people. Where such units, for example, hotels and boarding houses already exist in the university area, maximum funds are then available to provide additional study places in the university, and to improve generally the working conditions for the entire student body.

With an estimated cost of £1,400 per student accommodated, the total expenditure on accommodation becomes a substantial proportion of the capital requirements. For a resident population of 2,500 students an astronomical £3,500,000 would be required. In the Portrush/Portstewart region there is accommodation for over 2,600 students of a standard registered and approved annually by the Tourist Board. This accommodation is available during the entire university terms. This, then, is a major reason that the claims of the Coleraine/Portrush/Portstewart area are of the utmost significance to all Northern Ireland.

The local Hoteliers Association has discussed the problems arising from the utilisation of their accommodation by students, and have expressed their enthusiasm and willingness to co-operate with university authorities in setting up whatever regulations these authorities feel would be required. This figure of 2,600 places represents the largest single block of accommodation anywhere in Ulster.

Such factors have already weighed heavily in the setting up of the new University of Essex and Sussex, as is shown in the two extracts on the following pages.

'There are special reasons why we decided to encourage the proposals made to us by the local authorities in Sussex for the institution of a University College of Sussex in Brighton. The increased demand for university education has led to great pressure on London University. Owing to the congestion of London sites, the development in that area of a university institution is a particularly difficult and expensive operation. Moreover, most of the colleges of London University are deficient in residential facilities, and owing to the difficulty of finding lodgings students have to live at considerable distances. For these reasons we have been anxious to find means of relieving the pressure on London University, and the proposed University College of Sussex offers an opportunity of doing so. There is now no university in the densely populated area south of the Thames, east of a line from Reading to Southampton. A new institution at Brighton would thus help to serve the population of an area which is now largely dependent on London University. *Moreover, lodgings are available in Brighton in large numbers, and the demand for them there is a seasonal one, of which the peak comes in the university vacation. For this reason it will not be essential to provide living accommodation during the first stages of development, so that the*

(i)

Extract from
'University Development
1952 - 1957.'

initial capital cost of a university college at Brighton should be lower than it might be elsewhere'.

In his fourth Reith lecture on the BBC last night Dr Albert Sloman, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Essex, said that the question of living arrangements for students needed new thinking.

He outlined the plans of the University of Essex, which is to have no colleges or halls of residence. Instead, resident students will live in groups of about a dozen rooms arranged in 'towers'. 'In 1961-2 five students out of every ten in this country lived in lodgings, two lived at home, and three on the university site. The provision of the conventional hall of residence with its dining rooms and common rooms, warden's house and tutors' suites, sick bay, general rooms, and offices cost about £1,400 per student place, excluding furniture and fittings. It was also a costly place to run. Nor was it clear that this was a system which students wanted'.

'Many central common rooms', said Dr Sloman, 'are as empty as railway waiting rooms, coming alive only with vacation conferences'.

Financial reasons

The decisions at Essex were reached partly for financial reasons.

'Money spent on residence means less money for teaching and research, and therefore fewer student places. People who might have been admitted to the university will be excluded in order that a few may enjoy the advantage of residence. In Essex we do not want our expansion to be held up by the shortage of residential places. Fifteen miles or so away the sea-side hotels and boarding houses are empty for much of the year and at precisely the times when the university is in session. It is only common sense that we should make every effort to use this accommodation as well as lodgings near at hand.'

'The available money would be used, not to provide residential places for some students but good working and living conditions for all. The reasons for turning away from the conventional hall were not, however, only financial. This "nineteenth-century variant on a twelfth-century creation" was not necessarily the right answer for the nineteen-seventies and eighties'.

As discussed under the heading of availability of accommodation, the capital investment can be minimised by utilisation of the vast amount of accommodation available locally. Thus, in the first few years of its existence capital can be used to provide the main requirements of whatever faculties are to be established, faculty growth can be accelerated as a result, and only when the university is firmly established, need further consideration be given to provision of additional residential quarters. All four local authorities in this area have also agreed to give the utmost material support possible to the maintenance of a university in this area.

(ii)

Report in
Manchester Guardian
December 1963
of fourth Reith lecture
by Dr Albert Sloman

(e)

Capital investment
required and support from
local authorities

It is important that the location should be attractive to the staff, their wives and families, as a place in which to live. This is vital in order to recruit and retain tutors of adequate calibre. The region is superbly endowed with modern, up-to-date, primary, intermediate and secondary grammar schools. The scholastic and academic records of the Girls' High School, Coleraine Academical Institution, Dalriada High School, and the Dominican and Loretto Girls' Convent schools are particularly noteworthy.

Additionally, housing is obtainable at reasonable rates, and general amenities are more than adequate. This is borne out by the success of local new industries in their recruitment of highly qualified technical personnel, where the idyllic rural setting, wonderful beaches, and generally pleasant surroundings and good local amenities have proved of considerable benefit in obtaining staff having the necessary qualifications.

It has been said that the increase in student mobility has lessened the argument for confining new universities to the centre of densely populated catchment areas. This statement has formed part of the basis for the selection of the sites for new universities in England.

Although this is not an area of dense population, of the 3,782 Northern Ireland students in the year 1961, 23.5% or almost 1,100 students were from the Antrim and Londonderry areas. Taking the growth rate used for support of the case for a second university submitted by other bodies, it is clear that a university in the area proposed would, by 1967, be required to absorb a student population of close on 2,000 students and this would be, in the main, from Londonderry and Antrim areas. In addition, of course, it would be expected that the new university would provide faculty studies which would attract students from all areas of Ulster, and the presence of already available accommodation would allow for the absorption of up to 2,500 residents.

It was not generally held that this submission should recommend one specific site as being the only or ideal location. Nevertheless, investigation of site possibilities in the area by the use of aerial survey photographs, which are available for inspection, and by study of large scale ordnance survey maps, has established that there are several suitable locations.

Two interesting areas have been examined closely; both offer an opportunity and a challenge and sketch maps of these are available for inspection.

The committee are in no way committed to these sites and will co-operate most fully in providing information and in investigating other sites. In consideration of this question the committee have consulted with the County Planning Officer.

(f) Attractability of the location for staff

(g) Student population distribution

(h) Availability of sites