

# Former PSNI chief warns of loyalist groups' influence

Hamilton says paramilitaries rule neighbourhoods by fear and intimidation

MARK HENNESSY  
Ireland and Britain Editor

Loyalist paramilitaries were often behaving as "community workers by day and terrorists by night", former Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) chief constable George Hamilton has told a Westminster committee.

Mr Hamilton, who led the PSNI from 2014 to 2019, said loyalist communities must be empowered to resist the influence of paramilitaries in their neighbourhoods who ruled by fear and intimidation. Though supportive, Mr Hamilton and his predecessor Hugh Orde raised doubts about the likelihood of success of the new investigation into the existence of loyalist groups set up by the Irish and British governments last September.

Fleur Ravensbergen, an independent conflict-resolution and negotiation expert, was appointed to assess whether there was merit in and support for formal engagement with the paramilitary groups to bring about their end.

Some security briefings suggest the Ulster Defence Association has up to 12,000 members today – more than it had at the time of the 1998 Belfast Agreement, though many are said to be "card-carrying only".

"A lot of these people are



**“A lot of these people are still behaving in the same coercive, controlling way around their communities – former PSNI chief George Hamilton**

still behaving in the same coercive, controlling way around their communities," Mr Hamilton told the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on Wednesday.

"These groups are not legitimate, but they do have extensive control within communities, so their view of policing is burning out the drugs house, but it's probably going to be a drugs competitor that they're burning out."

Such coercive control "undermines the ability of the police to operate if there is an alternative policing faction essentially operating within the community."

Mr Hamilton and Mr Orde both said the costs attached to

legacy investigations and any subsequent legal claims must be completely separated from today's PSNI.

"The funding needs to be completely separated out from policing because it's just a constant suck on money," Mr Hamilton said.

Operation Kenova, the long-running investigation into the activities of Freddie Scappaticci, the British Army spy in the Provisional IRA, cost more than twice as much and lasted twice as long as originally thought, he said.

Mr Orde strongly defended the Historical Enquiry Team (HET) he set up to investigate legacy cases, which was eventually brought down by a sharply critical report from HM Inspector of Constabulary in 2015.

Still clearly angry about the closure of the HET, Mr Orde said he remained "very proud of the work they did" and the information about killings that they were able to share with victims' families.

"We told the families whatever we found out, which for many families was all they wanted to know," said Mr Orde, who was chief constable from 2002 to 2009.

The civil costs of meeting claims for reparations from victims' families now "seem uncontrollable", but most money being paid over by the PSNI was going to lawyers, not the families, he said.

"This will financially cripple operational frontline policing in Northern Ireland," he said, saying that it "soaks resources" away from dealing with today's challenges.



# Skerries plan provokes angry response

OLIVIA KELLY  
Dublin Editor

Plans to install cycle lanes, remove parking spaces and introduce a one-way system in Skerries have provoked an angry reaction among residents and businesses. They say the proposals will "choke" and "destroy" the north Dublin coastal town.

The draft Skerries Active Travel Plan aims to "enhance safety, accessibility and connectivity for all", Fingal County Council said, while "promoting walking and cycling... as convenient and attractive travel choices for short local journeys".

The council also says the plan seeks to strengthen connections to public transport, "supporting more sustainable travel options for medium and longer-distance trips", while

"reducing car dependency". Among the proposals is the introduction of a circular one-way system. It would run clockwise through the town centre from Thomas Hand Street to Strand Street and Church Street. Protected cycle tracks would be introduced in both directions on these streets and the number of car-parking spaces would be reduced.

Resigned Pedestrian crossings would be introduced in several areas and junctions – many of which the council says are "excessively wide" and "discourage slower, safer driving behaviour" – would be redesigned.

A public-realm strategy would see planting and public seating on main streets, while cycling connections would be provided through residential areas

and opportunities for outdoor dining would also be created.

More than 500 submissions were made on the draft plan during a 10-week consultation period which ended this week. While some respondents were supportive, the majority were strongly opposed to car restrictions, particularly the loss of parking spaces in the town centre.

"If parking becomes more difficult, businesses will suffer and the heart of Skerries will be ruined," a submission read. Another stated: "I have lived in Skerries for 24 years and find this plan deeply upsetting."

A number of submissions argued that the one-way system would cause congestion. They also contended that motorists were being "demonised" or "discriminated" against and the plan did not consider the needs of older people who were de-

pendent on cars. Some questioned the need for cycle lanes: "We do not have a need for cycle lanes as there is currently plenty of room on our roads for the cyclists amongst us."

Others said cyclists did not benefit local businesses. One wrote: "Cyclists are not exactly known for stopping by to make large purchases or availing of all the wonderful goods and services provided by our wonderful local businesses in Skerries town!"

Disadvantaged Several said locals were being disadvantaged for visitors. "Residents of the town must be prioritised over transiting and visiting individuals, particularly cyclists, in a country where cycling year round is impractical, whose needs will therefore primarily be seasonal," one submission said.

■ The plan for Skerries includes cycle lanes, the removal of parking spaces and the introduction of a one-way system

There were also objections to road or junction narrowing, with one person writing: "Our junctions are safe. Pedestrians should probably get off their phones and look left and right before crossing any road."

The same person added: "When will motorists get something? I've yet to see any plans to improve infrastructure for those that drive."

Another said: "I believe this plan to be anti-motorist, anti-commuter and anti-business, with the sole intention... to make driving so inconvenient and the main streets so inaccessible."

# Say what you like about McEntee, she's no Trump



Miriam Lord  
Dáil sketch

This is a worrying time in the world of people more used to worrying about the worries of different people in another part of the world.

But the old order is changing. Danger is knocking on their doorsteps now.

On an afternoon when they held their breath and waited to hear what class of bonkers Donald Trump was going to bring to the global elite's party in Davos, Dáil Éireann moved to address our particular fears.

The president of the United States – a once trusted ally – has gone doolally on a global scale and nobody quite knows what he might do next.

He wants to take over Greenland, which he keeps confusing with Iceland, so it's only a matter of time before he puts his eye on Ireland and her valuable reserves of mackerel and Leprechaunia.

TDs from across the political spectrum are at one with the populace in agreeing that we are in a very scary place now.

Yesterday, in a rapid action response, two and a half hours were set aside in the Dáil for "Statements on International Developments".

At the appointed time, five TDs crowded into the chamber to hear the Minister for Foreign Affairs Helen McEntee deliver an update "on recent developments in international relations at what is an extremely important time". The attendance would have been even bigger only for the fact that the lasagne was on in the canteen and it's always very popular.

"We are facing unprecedented and unpredictable geopolitical context," read McEntee in impeccable mandarin (Iveagh House version).

Say what you like about Helen, but she's no Donald Trump. There was no aimless meandering in search of muddled tangents, she hasn't lost the plot and the speech only lasted for about five minutes.

The Dáil got away very lightly in the verbals department compared to the powerful business and political big wigs forced to endure the Codswallop-in-Chief's 70-minute avalanche of

unconsciousness in a packed room in Switzerland. It was wonderful to see because they had to sit there and say nothing and they couldn't even sack anyone afterwards.

Obviously, the global media – already stretched chasing billionaires and David Beckham around Davos – found itself in a major quandary due to this unforeseen clash between Trump and the Irish parliament's stern statements.

This significant session in Leinster House was originally entitled "Statements on the State of Chassis" but it was changed to "International Developments" when it was feared that Trump might attempt to buy the State of Chassis from under the noses of the Irish people.

The Codswallop-in-Chief was already in full mumble in the Swiss Alps before the TDs got down to discussing world issues.

Sinn Féin's Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire was mindful of that other major event when he began his contribution, remarking: "We are sitting here and there's – I don't know what to call it – an interesting or noteworthy speech happening as we speak."

Yes it was. For Donald was announcing he is "gonna build a Golden Dome in Greenland like nothing

**“The Dáil got away very lightly in the verbals department**

ever seen before" and it will protect everyone in Greenland, Iceland, Ireland, Lapland, LaLaland and Lulahland.

They were jealous of this in the Dáil because the chamber roof is leaking. It too is a dome, but unlike Trump's mad dome the one above the Dáil chamber is made of wood and glass and it is not impervious to attack.

A good shower of rain is enough to exploit its weakness. There was a minor inundation above the Social Democrat seats during the lunch adjournment but somebody found a quick fix before business resumed.

During the state of chassis statements, numerous speakers repeated that we are in "uncharted waters", which is where some of the Soc Dems would have been had the leak not been patched.

In her update, Helen said the rules-based order on which our security and prosperity, and that of our EU partners depends, is increasingly under challenge.

She mentioned Russia's brutal war in Ukraine, the situation in Iran, Palestine and

Israel, America's recent unlawful swoop in Venezuela and Greenland. Not forgetting the recent US proposal for a "Board of Peace".

"The scope of the US proposal would appear to be wider than the Gaza peace plan," she said, stressing that Ireland is more of a UN type of country, attaching the highest importance to its role in maintaining international peace and security in accordance with international law.

"Ireland has received an invitation to join the Board of Peace, which we will consider in close co-ordination with our EU partners."

France has already told him to take a hike.

Trump is set on building the biggest ever Board of Peace. His spokespeople have denied reports that countries who want full membership as opposed to just lady or clubhouse membership will have to pay a billion dollars for the privilege. Apparently there is no minimum charge.

Everything is negotiable.

Box-office names

The president is also keen to acquire box-office names from the conflict business for his big beautiful board. He would love his pal Putrid to sign up and when the Irish TDs were speaking word came through that his other pal, Bibi Netanyahu, has climbed on-board. Former British prime minister Tony Blair has also signed up. Gerry Adams must be due a call any day.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs said she spoke to the EU's top diplomat, high representative Kaja Kallas, on Tuesday about developments in relation to Greenland, the Middle East and Ukraine.

Ursula von der Leyen's second in command recently quipped that perhaps now would be a good time to start drinking. Helen didn't say whether herself and Kaja went on the lash afterwards.

On the subject of "that piece of ice" Greenland, the Minister for Foreign Affairs said Ireland is "a strong advocate for transatlantic relations" and welcomes the recent increase in contact between Washington and Brussels.

However, all is not well. "This engagement is fundamentally challenged, however, by recent US actions and statements regarding Greenland and tariff threats against a number of EU member states, the UK and Norway."

McEntee stressed that Ireland's clear position is that the future of Greenland is something to be determined by Denmark and the Greenlandic people.

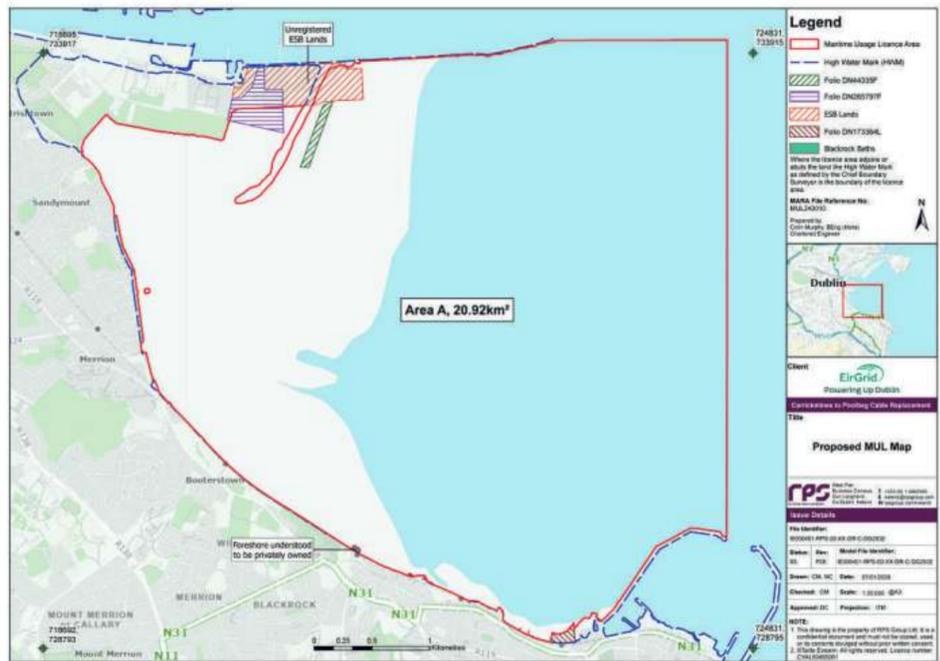
## PUBLIC NOTICE

The Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011

Invitation for public submissions on an application for a maritime usage licence and an appropriate assessment

EirGrid plc submitted an application to the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority ("MARA") for a maritime usage licence under section 117 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 to undertake marine site investigation surveys in Dublin Bay from Blackrock Park to Shellybanks and Poolbeg Lighthouse. The proposed MUL is required to enable EirGrid to acquire site specific technical and environmental data to provide a reliable basis for design development, and to support the consenting and construction phases of a proposed 220kV electrical cable circuit, the CP1146 Carrickmines to Poolbeg Project, which is part of EirGrid's Powering Up Dublin Programme.

The applicant has applied for a MUL duration of 2 years during which the surveys will be carried out on a phased basis.



A related Natura Impact Statement has been submitted with the above licence application. The licence application and the Natura Impact Statement are available for inspection on MARA's website [www.maritimeregulator.ie/application/mul240010](http://www.maritimeregulator.ie/application/mul240010) and at the following address by appointment – Maritime Area Regulatory Authority, 2nd Floor, Menapia House, Drinagh Business Park, Drinagh, Wexford, Y35 RF29.

Members of the public who wish to make a submission in writing to MARA on the licence application and the Natura Impact Statement may do so quoting ref: MUL240010 to the following e-mail address – [licence@mara.gov.ie](mailto:licence@mara.gov.ie) or by post to the following address – Licence Unit, Maritime Area Regulatory Authority, 2nd Floor, Menapia House, Drinagh Business Park, Drinagh, Wexford, Y35 RF29.

The closing date and time for a written submission to be received by MARA is 17.30 on 22/02/2026.

MARA will then, as soon as practicable, carry out the appropriate assessment determination in accordance with Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011. After the determination, MARA will either grant, part grant or refuse the licence application.

Dated this 22nd day of January 2026

Signed:

Representative of EirGrid plc

