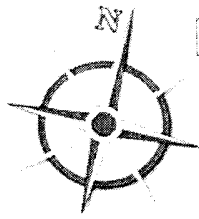


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North Belfast Interface Network

NBIN

Working for positive change

Submission on Draft EQIA from NBIN:

Addressing Interface issues

It is the belief of the North Belfast Interface Network that the issues pertaining to housing on the proposed Crumlin Road gaol/ Girdwood site cannot begin to be addressed without a systematic and committed approach from government to deal with interfaces, both on the site and in its wider geographic setting. To address the housing inequalities in North Belfast, a comprehensive analysis is needed. The Draft EQIA includes statistics on age, religious belief, marital status, and dependants, in relation to housing. However, while inequalities have been identified there is no definitive commitment to address the issues within the Draft EQIA. Nowhere in the document is the need identified for a dedicated response to the interface or recognising it's obvious impediment to resolving the housing issue.

An online poll conducted on <http://nbmovingon.blogspot.com> over the summer of 2007 asked: *Can Crumlin Road Gaol/ Girdwood be successfully regenerated as a "shared space" without addressing the interface issues?* To which 87% of those polled said NO.

Despite inequalities being highlighted relating to housing in the Draft EQIA, the Department goes on to state its preferred option as 'shared housing'. We are concerned about the phrasing of housing need as a 'sectarian' issue within the document. This ignores the fact that different need exists in relation to a person's gender, disability, age or dependant status etc which would also have an impact on proposals around housing type.

This Draft EQIA fails to state how housing inequalities in our community will be addressed through shared housing on the Girdwood site – as there is no firm commitment to tackle existing inequalities or to address the interface issues. This must be done before the regeneration moves to the next stages. NBIN has outlined its concerns and recommendations on such issues in its response to the Draft Plan to Government "Building a better future" which is attached and can also be found on line at http://www.nbin.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=24&Itemid=2

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North Belfast Interface Network

Introduction The Stormont Assembly consultation document called "Building a Better Future - Draft Budget and Programme for Government 2008-2011 and Draft Investment Strategy 2008-2018" has implications for everyone living here. There is only one budget and there are many competing pressures for these resources. We must recognise that increased spending in one area inevitably means a reduction elsewhere. People need to look at how this Programme for Government benefits and improves the quality of life for all our citizens and at how their concerns/needs are being addressed. The Programme for Government is an important statement on all our futures. The establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive is a major step forward and as the Programme for Government asserts: "We are entering a more optimistic and promising era. As an Executive, we are determined to seize this opportunity to deliver a better and more sustainable future for all our people. We aim to build a prosperous, fair and inclusive society, supported by a vibrant and dynamic economy and a rich and sustainable environmental heritage." The Government document highlights a number of key principles: *Providing good leadership and working energetically in the interests of everyone. Working in partnership Raising standards Delivering fair outcomes and social improvements*

NBIN Response The North Belfast Interface Network enthusiastically agrees with this vision and principles as a way of moving forward. However, we fear that unless we have planned actions aimed at interface communities, especially in North and West Belfast, these areas will tend to fall further and further behind the peaceful, fair and prosperous society that we all hope to build. The interface barriers and interface problems will not simply disappear or go away. We need to plan and create conditions in which they can go away over a period of time.

The NBIN submission looks at: *The origin of interfaces and interface walls in 1969 and background to interface work.*

Barriers were erected in 1969 to reduce inter community conflict. We all know the history of how they developed and created a patchwork of orange and green across North and West Belfast. We know how the violence flared and has now changed somewhat. Over the past 4/5 years we have moved from a situation where blast bombs, pipe bombs, nail bombs and petrol bombs were being used nightly, to a situation where they have almost disappeared.

The rationale for interface work continuing today

The nature of the violence may be changing and more people have become involved in cross community work and cross border work. but few are yet involved in cross

interface work – this is where we see the work in the future. This is why we believe that government needs to work with interface communities to develop a programme with the overall aim of eradicating interfaces within 20 years.

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50% of interface communities by the end of 2009 for this purpose; and with all interface communities by the end of 2010.

Government to prepare a 10-year budget to resource this cross-interface work by April 2008. Government commits to consult community organisations working at interfaces on this budget.

Conclusion We need a commitment at the heart of Government to address the regeneration of interface communities both strategically and comprehensively. This means placing interfaces in the Programme for Government as this connects so many themes of Government planning including tackling disadvantage, making people healthier, promoting community safety, education skills development and employment.

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