

North Belfast Forum for Housing Action

Response on the Draft Equality Impact Assessment on the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Barracks draft Masterplan.

20th January 2009:

The North Belfast Housing Forum for Housing Action is a broad-based group established to tackle the inequalities and flawed policies currently relating to housing issues in North Belfast.

The Forum is Community-led, and non-sectarian pro-actively working to garner support across all communities, political parties, trade unions, rights activities and statutory agencies for 5 key demands:

- 1) To ensure equal access to housing provision and housing allocation on the basis of need.
- 2) To replace quick fix high-rise/high density solutions with policies that provide family homes, which in turn adequately address the needs of the community.
- 3) To challenge and expose private developers domination and monopoly of the housing market.
- 4) End to land banking.
- 5) Standardised policies across housing bodies.

- **North Belfast Forum for Housing Action & our interest in Girdwood:**

The Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Park regeneration site offers the residents of north Belfast a unique opportunity to ease our most pressing problem-the housing shortage in north Belfast. For the Girdwood site to realise its full potential-social housing must be included.

Having studied various examples of EQIA's, it is clear that the purpose of an EQIA is to see how equality of opportunity can be best promoted. Therefore to address the many housing inequalities

in North Belfast-a comprehensive analysis is needed which considers all sections of our society. The Draft EQIA does include 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.

With no commitment on this issue we fear that once again disadvantaged communities will be left behind.

While we accept that Girdwood cannot solve all the problems of housing in North Belfast, it can provide a level of social housing which can have an impact on this situation affecting the most vulnerable people in our community.

Evidence from focus groups is quoted selectively i.e. while the views of young people (16 and younger) that apartments would be preferable to houses, groups of elderly and people with dependents (Silver Threads focus group) highlighted that, based on their experience, apartments are not suitable to meet their needs. The latter is not cited in the Draft EQIA.

Despite inequalities being highlighted relating to housing in the Draft EQIA, the Department goes on to state it's 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 persons 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. This must be done before the regeneration moves to the next stages.