

A response to the Draft Equality Impact Assessment on the future of Girdwood Barracks and Crumlin Road Gaol sites

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Equality Impact Assessment consultation over the future of the Girdwood Barracks and Crumlin Road Gaol sites.
- 1.2 There is great hope locally that the regeneration of these sites can offer a once in a lifetime opportunity to the communities that surround these sites in the lower Cliftonville, lower Oldpark, Shankill, New Lodge, Ardoyne and Tigers Bay. These communities are amongst those that have bore the brunt of 30-40 years of political and sectarian conflict and have been by-passed any economic peace dividend.
- 1.3 The recent report from the Regional Forecasts for Belfast City Council shows that unless there is a change in government policy disadvantaged communities in North Belfast will continue to fall behind the rest of Belfast. Government policy needs to change but North Belfast needs to change too.
- 1.4 Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum is in favour of cross community dialogue to enable the two main communities to come together and develop a vision for these sites which could help heal the divisions of the last 40 years. We also believe that we need to work together to get local people into work with meaningful and decent wages.
- 1.5 The regeneration of Girdwood and the Gaol offers an opportunity to create real wealth and act to boost the local economy. This has the possibility of getting local people, residents and young people into training and into real jobs.
- 1.6 North Belfast needs investment from government and from the private sector to boost the local economy. People need to come into North Belfast and they need to feel secure and confident so that they can buy, invest, work, visit and live here. In order to assist this we need to address the interface issues in North Belfast to create economic, social and community opportunity where once they only created fear, tension, violence and death.
- 1.7 The regeneration and the Equality Impact Assessment of Girdwood and the Gaol sites takes place in the context of a highly divided, highly disadvantaged and unequal community. Crumlin, Shankill, New Lodge, Duncairn, Ardoyne, and Water Works are in the top 4% most deprived wards in Northern Ireland.

2.0 The draft Equality Impact Assessment

- 2.1 Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum would hope that the Equality Impact Assessment can ensure that the equality of opportunity of North Belfast residents can be promoted in the course of the regeneration of the Girdwood and the Gaol sites.
- 2.2 However, the draft Equality Impact Assessment provides insufficient evidence to enable a comprehensive plan to address existing inequalities in North Belfast.
- 2.3 In terms of employment we believe that there is insufficient detail and subsequently analysis to enable the development of a comprehensive plan to address existing employment inequalities amongst Section 75 groups. The only figures provided are for men and women.

- 2.4 Far reaching conclusions are drawn in relations to all Section 75 groups based on a very weak evidence base and this would we suggest weakens the conclusions.
- 2.5 The draft Equality Impact Assessment Equality said: "In overall terms the redevelopment of the site in itself provides an opportunity for the creation of employment. Focus group participants said that apprenticeships must be provided during the development of the site and an on-site training facility could assist in skills development. Indeed the draft Masterplan proposes this. As the development of the site will take a number of years to roll out, the level of sustained construction activity will create the opportunity for a site based training facility".
- 2.6 Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum would support this approach. However, the role of an Equality Impact Assessment is to move beyond ideas and concepts and begin to make actual proposals to address employment inequalities. We believe that the Equality Impact Assessment should make a definite proposal for an on-site training facility with a targeted number of apprenticeships and other training opportunities targeted at persons experiencing employment inequality.
- 2.7 We believe that there is a need for other training schemes aimed at securing employment on the site or using the site as a catalyst to employment. We believe that public procurement and the public tendering process in the course of the regeneration of the sites can and should be used to promote equality of opportunity for all Section 75 groups that experience employment inequality.
- 2.8 We believe that social and community enterprises should be established and supported to enable local communities to develop assets, an earned income and help the development of an indigenous economic base. The development of a community enterprise centre owned by both communities could also assist the development of an indigenous economic base with social enterprises working with the Small and Medium-sided Enterprises and community services on the sites. This would create local training and employment opportunities.
- 2.9 However, a weakness of the draft Equality Impact Assessment is that there is i) a lack of a detailed presentation of the evidence of employment inequality, ii) a weak analysis of the problems and underlying causes of these problems, and subsequently, iii) little by way of proposals, details or targets on how present inequalities can be addressed.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 This draft Equality Impact Assessment fails to provide a comprehensive outline of the existing employment inequalities in North Belfast. This along with a detailed analysis of the problems and underlying causes is necessary before a detailed proposal to address these inequalities can be produced. This will need to be completed before the regeneration of the Girdwood Barracks and Crumlin Road Gaol Masterplan can proceed.

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