



5th July 2012

Dear

On the 21st May 2012 the Social Development Minister Nelson McCausland announced plans for Girdwood which did not evidence how it will contribute towards addressing the inequality experienced by those in most need of new build social housing in North Belfast.

We noted from press coverage at the time that you were party to this announcement and to the decision reached on the Girdwood site.

Earlier this week, the Minister detailed to the Northern Ireland Assembly serious concerns about NIHE maintenance and repairs. An issue we have highlighted with you and offered to brief you on in the past.

We are writing to you as residents of north Belfast who are experiencing housing stress, poor housing conditions and people who have time and time again been left out of decisions made about plans for social housing new build in north Belfast.

We are writing to you as members of the Seven Towers Residents' Group, a group which has been campaigning for equality in housing for over six years and whose work has been highly commended by a wide variety of individuals including Mary Robinson (former President of Ireland), Thomas Hammarberg (European Commissioner for Human Rights), Virginia Bras Gomes (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) and Raquel Rolnik (UN Special Rapporteur on the right to Housing).

We are writing to you as your constituents.

As you will be aware the main indicator of new build housing need is expressed through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's social housing waiting list numbers in housing stress, which currently amounts to over 2400 applicants in north Belfast.

You will also be aware that there is a significant differential in the levels of people facing housing stress from different religious backgrounds with the Catholic community representing in excess of 70% of this total, despite making up 45% of the north Belfast population. Additionally, according to the NIHE, by 2012 over 90% of new build social housing in north Belfast must be targeted at the catholic community to address inequality.

EQUALITY CAN'T WAIT – IT'S TIME TO IMPLEMENT THE LAW

These housing inequalities experienced by the Catholic community are not a new occurrence but have been repeated year on year. Catholic inequality in housing in north Belfast is not inherent, or the fault of people in dire need of housing. They are the direct result of poor government decision making.

Girdwood is one of a long line of decisions made by the Department for Social Development and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive which denies equality to the residents of North Belfast. Despite the fact that promoting equality of opportunity is a legal power and legal obligation under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, both bodies have failed to make decisions based on the law. Although the details have not been made public, the evidence to date shows that the plans for the Girdwood site have ignored the overwhelming housing inequality that impacts the Catholic community in north Belfast.

This letter has also been sent to the other five north Belfast political representatives who appeared alongside you in the press photograph on the 21st May. It has one simple request, that you detail in writing

- a) how you and your party plan to ensure the current housing inequality in North Belfast is tackled
- b) how the decision taken on the Girdwood site will go towards addressing the existing housing inequality in north Belfast, in accordance with the law .

We would be grateful to receive your response by **Monday 16th July 2012**.

Please send it to:

c/o Participation and the Practice of Rights
133 Royal Avenue
Belfast
BT1 1FG

A copy of this letter has also been distributed to local media outlets.

Yours sincerely

Angie Mc Manus, Marissa McMahon, Brenda Menham.

Members of Seven Towers Residents Group.

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