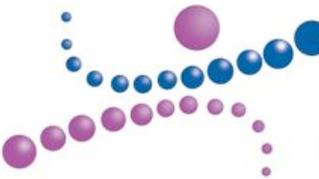


# Changing the Patterns of the Past

*Putting People First  
in the Regeneration of  
North Belfast*



**PPR**  
Participation  
and the Practice of  
Rights Project

*The Participation and the Practice of Rights Project exists to promote awareness of international human rights instruments and standards and support marginalised communities and groups to use them in accessing services and achieving equality.*

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## **Executive Summary**

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Residents of North Belfast live with a legacy of structural discrimination and deprivation, which has consequences for their health, housing, education and employment. Under the NI Executive's *Building a Better Future, Programme for Government 2008-2011*, urban regeneration is a tool to tackle this legacy, build sustainable economic growth and change the existing realities of people's lives.

The Department for Social Development is currently at different stages in developing six regeneration Masterplans for North Belfast, all ideally placed to target existing social and economic inequalities. Some of the plans were initiated and approved by Direct Rule Ministers.

The DSD published three of its six Masterplans for the area (North East Quarter, North West Quarter, Crumlin Road Gaol & Girdwood Barracks) in the absence of any strategic planning specific to North Belfast. The DSD now plans to publish the three remaining Masterplans at the same time as a 'Strategic Regeneration Framework' for North Belfast. This evidences the lack of any strategic approach to the regeneration Masterplans.

The approach taken to promoting equality through the Masterplans, as required by law, has also been inconsistent, with some of the plans being subject to an equality analysis before Ministerial approval, and some requiring approval from the Minister before an analysis of how they will target existing inequalities is carried out.

The current framework will not break the patterns of the past, where regeneration processes have ultimately benefitted already prosperous businesses and communities and existing inequalities are entrenched. Yet the situation is not irreversible. In order to ensure valuable government resources are not wasted on a regeneration process which does not deliver change, the following principles are proposed:

- Recognition that the 'more of the same' approach to the North Belfast regenerations has resulted in the current chaotic framework. Legal and policy requirements on equality and objective need must be mainstreamed throughout all plans for regeneration in North Belfast in order to avoid wasting both resources and opportunities.
- A strategic framework for all North Belfast regeneration plans must be developed which sets out how the existing inequalities and deprivation will be targeted through the regenerations, both individually and collectively.
- Informed by the strategic framework, all individual Masterplan proposals should set out practical and effective measures to target inequalities in the area, in conjunction with the other plans.

- A process which encourages and enables affected communities, in particular disadvantaged communities, to participate meaningfully in the design, development, implementation and monitoring of the regenerations in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the Gasworks regeneration.
- Within this process, there must be clear accountability mechanisms to ensure decisions are taken in a transparent and open manner, fully informed and capable of adjustment or redress if and when issues arise.

# Introduction

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*“My crude principle now... would be, for anybody from the disadvantaged communities or working on the behalf of, or with those, disadvantaged communities is don't let the designs be signed off – don't let one brick be put on another brick until the disadvantaged people of the local communities have been prepared to get meaningful benefit from the development. Because, you see, if it goes up, it'll fly – it'll fly up, up, and away it will be. It will have no meaningful relationship with the disadvantaged people of the surrounding communities – none. And, that's what's happening with the Gasworks.”*  
–Ken Humphreys, Community Worker during the Gasworks Regeneration

Residents of North Belfast live with a legacy of structural discrimination and deprivation. Some of its electoral wards, and those with which this report is concerned, consistently rank in the bottom 1% for education, housing, employment and health deprivation across Northern Ireland. Urban regeneration should be a tool to begin systematically targeting, tackling, and reversing this legacy.

The Department for Social Development (DSD) is at different stages in developing six regeneration Masterplans for North Belfast. Many of these plans were initiated by Direct Rule Ministers. All six Masterplans are ideally placed in or between deprived electoral wards, giving the government a strategic opportunity to reduce inequalities and tackle social and economic deprivation in the target areas.

This report identifies serious concerns about how the proposals for these Masterplans, which include commitments to invest hundreds of millions of pounds, are being developed.

It identifies the inefficient, non-strategic and varied approach that these regeneration Masterplans have taken towards addressing the conditions that hinder the opportunities and quality of life for residents. It points out where processes have been flouting legal requirements and highlights the inefficient use of government resources. It highlights how regeneration models which treat social and economic deprivation and inequality as residual issues serve only to repeat the failed patterns of the past. A sustainable and integrated model of economic growth will require the active involvement of local communities at each and every stage of processes designed to increase their skills base and ensure their participation in the labour market. This will ensure the vision of real and long-lasting change laid out in the Programme for Government is made a reality.

*“Addressing poverty, disadvantage and exclusion will require co-ordinated action to support the most vulnerable and to create strong, vibrant sustainable communities which enhance quality of life and which encourage everyone to realise their potential. To this end we will develop a strategic delivery plan to ensure our anti-poverty strategy has maximum impact. We must regenerate our urban and rural areas, build community capacity and leadership, remove the barriers to employment and independent living for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, and address significant inequalities in health and educational outcomes.”*

**–Building a Better Future, Programme for Government, 2008-2011**

## **Principles of Successful Urban Regeneration**

If regeneration projects are to be successful and to meet the needs of marginalised groups of people, plans must ensure equality, accountability and participation are central. Existing legal and policy tools designed to realise these principles must be implemented in order to change existing realities.

- **Equality**, or the tackling of existing inequalities, must be a key objective. By crafting policies and proposals to promote equality of opportunity, regeneration plans will be able to more effectively and efficiently improve people’s lives;
- Governments must be held **accountable** to the commitments they have made in policies, legislation and treaties. We need to make sure they promote equality, target objective need and involve the community in a consistent and transparent way;
- Meaningful **participation** by affected communities – particularly and primarily disadvantaged communities – must be agreed between local communities and the government. Such participation must be promoted and facilitated in the design, development, implementation and evaluation stages of regeneration. Failed regenerations from Britain and Ireland, such as the Gasworks, show that traditional forms of consultation have not resulted in tangible changes for deprived communities.

## **Policy Context and Obligations**

Legislation, policy, and governmental priorities exist to translate these principles into action. For example, Section 75 of the NI Act (1998) makes the promotion of equality – in all of government operations – mandatory. It also promotes the participation of disadvantaged groups in processes such as regeneration. It is important to note that this requires going beyond traditional ‘consultation’ exercises in order to ensure those who are least visible are able to actively participate.

The NI Executive’s *Programme for Government and Budget 2008-2011* states: **“This is the challenge for all of us today — to develop new and innovative measures that will address existing patterns of socio-economic disadvantage and target resources and efforts towards those in greatest objective need.”**

*“Equality schemes, and equality impact assessments, are intended to increase participation and inclusion, to change the culture of public decision making, and to place a more proactive approach to the promotion of equality at the heart of public policy”*  
**Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment, Equality Commission February 2005, p.3**

The “challenge” is there for us all – but particular onus lies with those who have a responsibility to tackle this discrimination and neglect. And what this report reveals is that despite these legislative and policy commitments, regeneration in North Belfast is systematically failing to meet this challenge.

*International Human rights law, to which the British and Irish Governments are signatories, states that governments must “give due priority to those social groups living in unfavourable conditions giving them particular consideration. Policies and legislation should correspondingly not be designed to benefit already advantaged social groups at the expense of others”*

**UNCESCR, General Comment 4, Sixth session, 1991, E/1992/23.**

If the regeneration of these areas is going to improve people’s lives, the inequalities, deprivation and rights of the residents must be the starting point of the process. In the current fiscal climate, we need to ensure the government spends its resources in the most efficient and strategic way in order to develop a successful and sustainable model of economic growth. If inequalities and objective need are not addressed, governmental spending will increase in attempts to deal with the consequences, as opposed to the causes, of inequality. The ‘challenge’ demands innovation. The ‘challenge’ demands that government bodies and agencies display the commitment to overcome them and not retreat into the patterns of the past. The ‘challenge’ demands that we collectively learn the lessons of previous mistakes to

turn this once off opportunity for North Belfast into an example of best practice – where the real beneficiaries are those in most need.

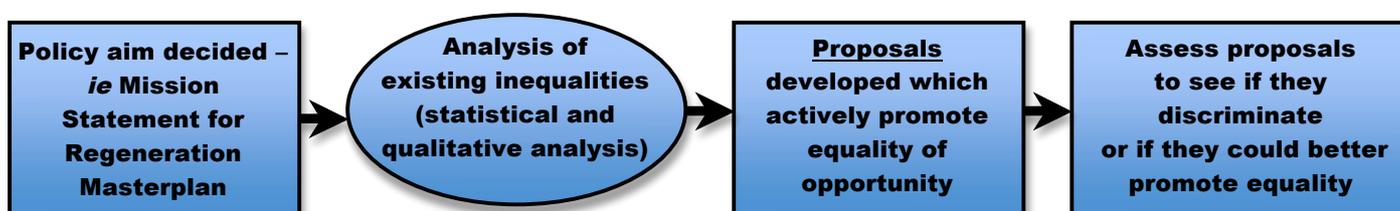
As this report highlights, it is not too late to resolve these issues. ‘Not one brick’ has been laid.

## **What Should Have Been Done?**

Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) are tools to ensure both that equality of opportunity is promoted and that affected groups are empowered to participate in decisions affecting their lives. They are not an end in themselves but a means to promote equality. As Equality Commission guidelines state: **“Equality schemes, and equality impact assessments, are intended to increase participation and inclusion, to change the culture of public decision making, and to place a more proactive approach to the promotion of equality at the heart of public policy.”** (p.3)

To follow these guidelines and to ensure that the purpose of the EQIA is fulfilled, Equality Impact Assessments on regeneration Masterplans should follow these basic steps:

### ***Required Order for an Equality Impact Assessment***



### **Why Do EQIAs need to follow these steps?**

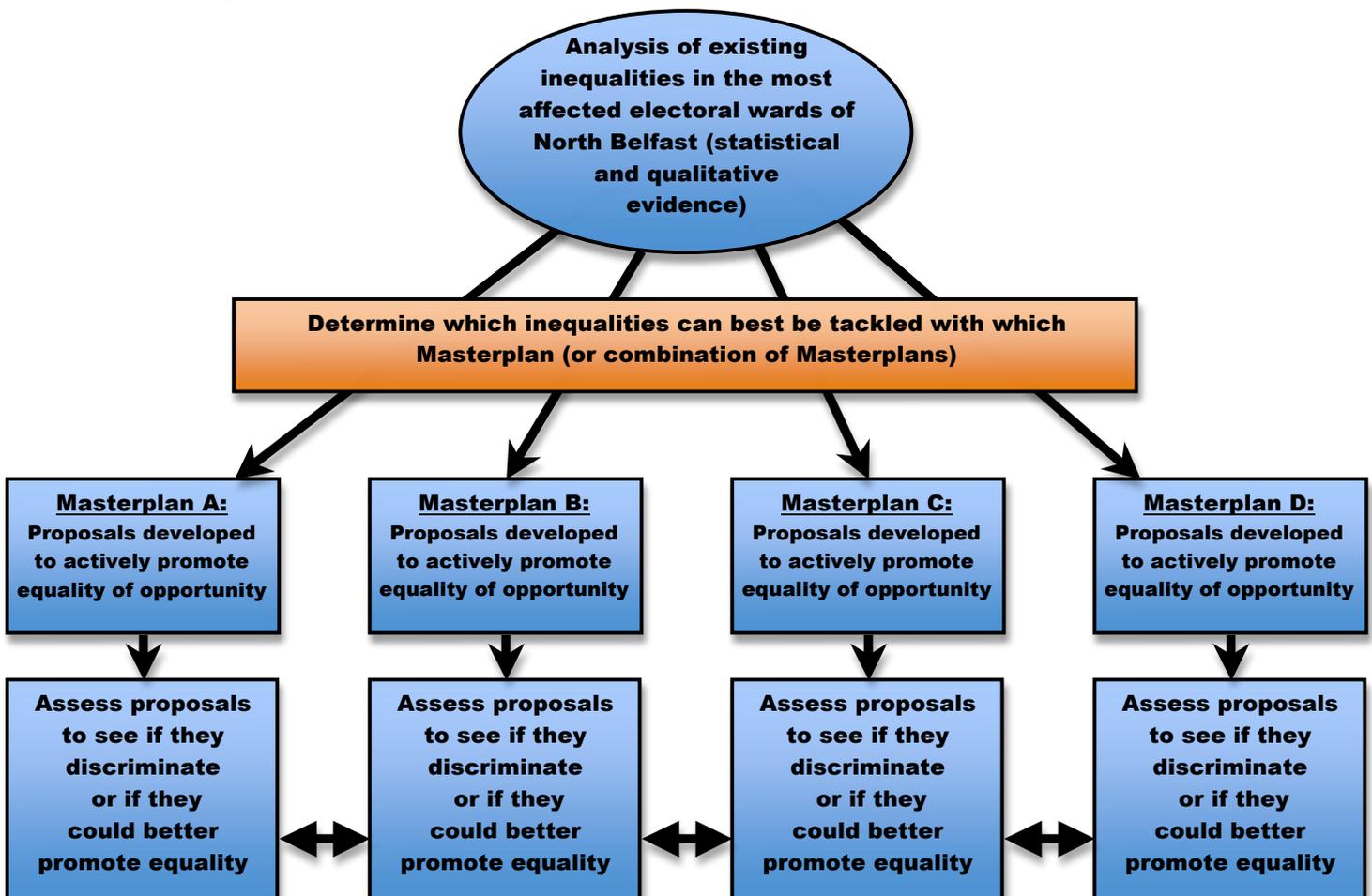
- It's the law; it's mainstream government policy; and it's one of two core themes to the NI Executive's Programme for Government.
- For policies and proposals to actively promote equality of opportunity, you have to know what inequalities need to be changed. This requires more than just looking at the numbers. You have to understand how the lack of opportunities affect people's lives.
- Done correctly, an EQIA leads to better outcomes for all the people who live in an area, because it makes sure proposals address the real needs of people on the ground.
- Done correctly, an EQIA ensures public resources are spent in the most efficient and effective way. By taking the time to analyse what needs to be changed and how best to do it through meaningful public participation, governments can ensure that the causes and consequences of inequalities are targeted and addressed from the outset.
- Done correctly, an EQIA turns the promotion of equality into a foundation for developing a sustainable society and economy.

Importantly, producing effective regeneration plans for North Belfast requires more than just following the right steps for Equality Impact Assessments. Because there are six Masterplans being designed for this small area of Northern Ireland, there must also be strategic planning and frameworks to ensure that these regeneration plans work together and not against each other. In a statement about Northern Ireland's overall strategy for regeneration, the Department for Regional Development recently articulated, **"We need a long-term vision within which all our actions can fit. For a vision without clear direction of how it can be achieved, is not worth the paper it is written on. Our vision needs to include clear strategic direction about how it can be achieved by numerous small steps now and in future years."**

It is critical that our government adhere to this approach in the practical policies they propose because:

- To efficiently spend resources and build sustainable communities, we cannot take an unstrategic approach to urban regeneration in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland. Equality and human rights need to be streamlined into the broader plans for all of North Belfast;
- Proposals should be developed in the context of a strategic framework. This ensures that individual plans can be improved with and checked against other plans. In this way, regeneration can better serve the public interest and tackle inequality more effectively.

To achieve these goals, the government should have followed something like the procedure detailed below. It is an efficient way of linking a broader strategic framework with the EQIA procedure.



## What Actually Happened?

Thus far, the government's Masterplans for North Belfast have neither taken strategic planning seriously, nor have they mainstreamed equality into the planning process. In short, the government has not spent the public's money in the most efficient and effective way.

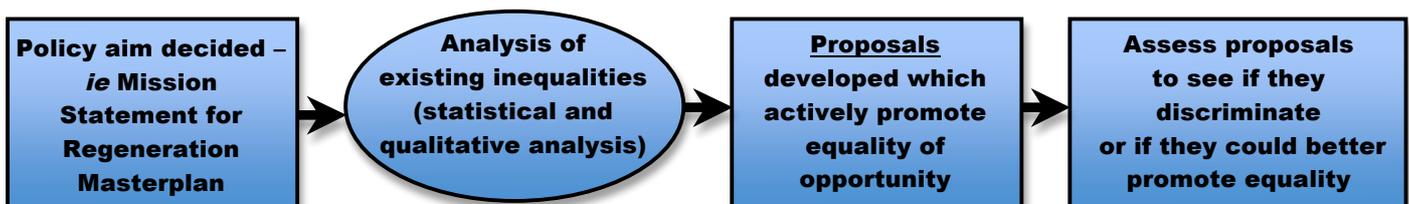
### A Failure to Strategically Plan

Strategic planning for the regeneration of North Belfast has been both illogical and inefficient.

- No formal strategic planning specific to North Belfast took place before the government published three of its six Masterplans for the area (North East Quarter Masterplan, North West Quarter Masterplan, Crumlin Road Gaol & Girdwood Barracks Masterplan).
- The government plans to publish the strategic plan for North Belfast at the same time as the final three Masterplans for North Belfast. As a result the public's input on the strategic planning will be too late to inform the development of the proposals that have already been published in the earlier Masterplans.
- The DSD has stated publicly that the strategic planning taking place is not being done in the ideal order and is not "a perfect situation". Recognising this fact is not enough – it must prompt action to rectify the situation.

Alone, this failure to plan strategically for the regeneration of North Belfast should seriously concern both communities and the new, devolved institutions. Unfortunately, however, this is also combined with a failure to streamline equality. The Masterplans have not promoted equality of opportunity, and there is no strategy, timetable or transparent process proposed to measure how they will systematically tackle disadvantage.

As you will recall, the required order for an EQIA is as follows:



This streamlines the promotion of equality into the Masterplanning process by ensuring, first, that policies are designed specifically to tackle inequality and, second, that a diverse group of people (with a specific focus on the most disadvantaged) are able to participate directly throughout the regeneration process.

As will become clear in the next few pages, the government has been both inconsistent in the way it uses EQIAs and, when they have conducted them, they have done so in a way that does not place the promotion of equality of opportunity at the heart of the regeneration. They do not provide clear and effective mechanisms to show how any of their proposals will be measured as to their effectiveness in tackling disadvantage.

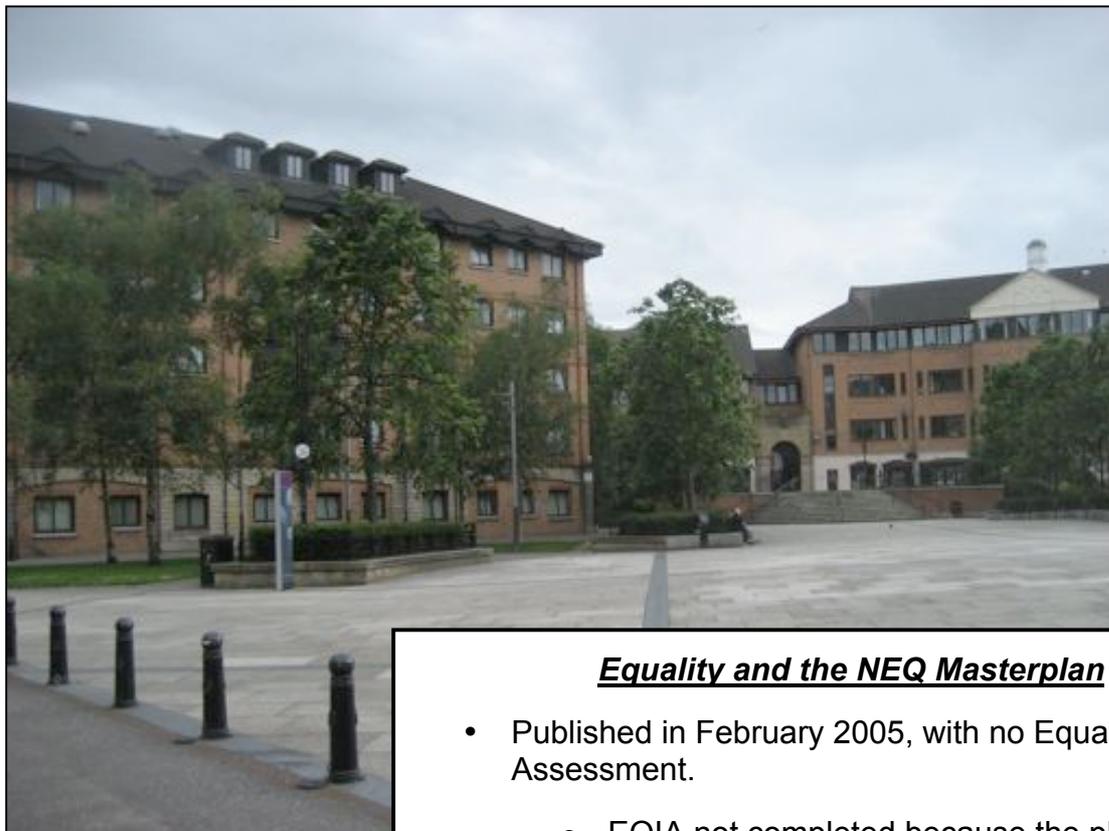
Specifically, Equality Impact Assessments carried out by the government thus far have used the following procedure:



### Why Is This Type of EQIA Ineffective?

- The EQIA should be used to promote equality of opportunity and to ensure that policies and proposals do not discriminate. The government's EQIAs only focus on the latter. They only test whether policies or proposals discriminate against or do harm to groups of people.
- Using this method, policies and proposals developed cannot be effectively designed to improve equality of opportunity, because there has not been an initial analysis of what the inequalities in the area are. The government will continue to waste resources if it does not develop a transparent, participatory and measurable way to analyse the effectiveness of proposals.
- International human rights documents (which the UK and Ireland have ratified) and s75 of the NI Act require the people most affected by regeneration plans to participate and be consulted throughout the planning process. Not only should they be involved in the evaluation of proposals, they should also participate throughout the process, including in the initial planning of proposals. The failures of the Gasworks and other regenerations evidence the importance of involving affected communities throughout the planning process to ensure their voices are meaningfully heard.

# North East Quarter Masterplan



*Writers' Square in the North East Quarter*

## **Equality and the NEQ Masterplan**

- Published in February 2005, with no Equality Impact Assessment.
  - EQIA not completed because the plan was “too conceptual.”
- Public Consultation completed shortly after publication.
  - Consultation responses from various organisations, expressing concern about equality issues for the disabled and for parents with young children.
  - Again, no EQIA deemed necessary because the plan was “too conceptual.”
- Masterplan approved by the Direct Rule Minister David Hanson in August 2005.
- **No Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out on this Masterplan.**

**EQIA Status: Not done. No plans for one. No measurement of how proposals will tackle disadvantage and inequality. Potential waste of resources.**

# North West Quarter Masterplan

## Equality and the NWQ Masterplan

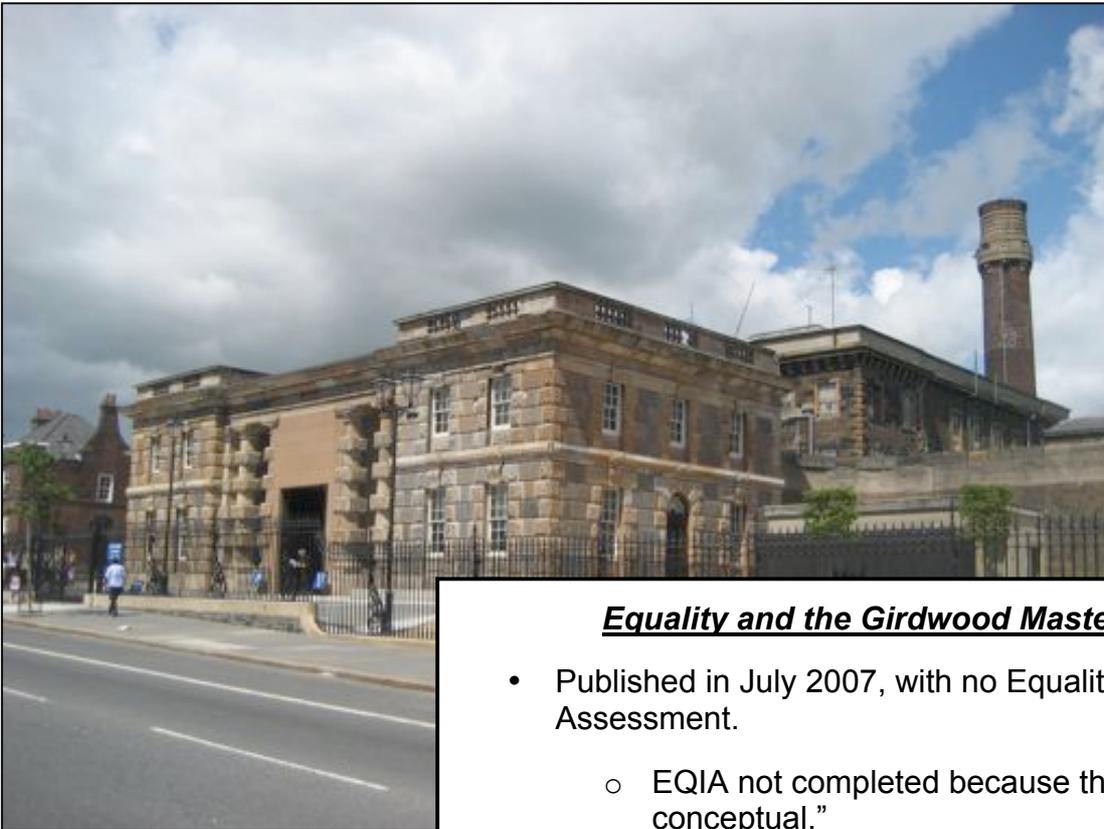
- Published in February 2005, with no Equality Impact Assessment.
  - EQIA not completed because the plan was “too conceptual.”
- Public Consultation completed shortly after publication.
  - Consultation responses from various organisations, expressing concern about equality issues for employment access on the basis of religion, for disability access and much more.
  - Again, no EQIA deemed needed because the plan was “too conceptual.”
- Masterplan approved by Direct Rule Minister David Hanson in August 2005.
- **Minister Margaret Ritchie decides to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment during the summer of 2008. Currently out for consultation.**



*Carrick Hill in the North West Quarter*

**EQIA Status: Out for consultation. No measurement of how proposals will tackle disadvantage and inequality. Potential waste of resources.**

# Crumlin Road Gaol & Girdwood Barracks Masterplan



*Crumlin Road Gaol*

## **Equality and the Girdwood Masterplan**

- Published in July 2007, with no Equality Impact Assessment.
  - EQIA not completed because the plan was “too conceptual.”
- Public Consultation completed shortly after publication.
  - Consultation responses from various organisations, expressing concern about equality issues for employment access, for housing access and quality, for education, for health and more.
  - Again, no EQIA deemed needed because the plan was “too conceptual.”
- **Minister Margaret Ritchie states that she will not approve the Masterplan until an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out.**
- **EQIA to be carried out during the summer and autumn of 2008.**

**EQIA Status: Being done. No measurement of how proposals will tackle disadvantage and inequality. Potential waste of resources.**

## Lower Shankill, Crumlin Road and Shore Road / York Road Masterplans



### Equality and the Unpublished Masterplans

- Five new Masterplans (including the plans for the Lower Shankill, Crumlin Road and Shore Road / York Road) will be published during the summer of 2008.
- Public Consultation will be completed shortly after publication.
- In response to a Freedom of Information request, the DSD has explained that **they do not plan to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment on any of the Masterplans until after the Minister has approved them.**



Oldpark Library (top), Graffiti on the Lower Shankill Road (above)

**EQIA Status: No plans for EQIAs yet. No measurement of how proposals will tackle disadvantage and inequality. Potential waste of resources.**

## **Summary of Findings**

The current focus on regenerating sites in North Belfast such as the Lower Shankill and Girdwood Barracks will mean that much needed investment, programmes and effort will be expended at the heart of some of the most deprived communities in Northern Ireland. It is crucial therefore, that this opportunity does not go to waste.

The lack of any strategic framework for the regenerations and the subsequent chaotic state of the current Masterplans for North Belfast serve as warning signs. The timing of the forthcoming 'Strategic Regeneration Framework' for North Belfast - following in the wake of the publication of these six North Belfast Masterplans - highlights the risk that all North Belfast communities will be failed by this piecemeal approach to regeneration.

This one-off opportunity to tackle some of the most entrenched inequalities that have blighted these communities through a strategic approach to regeneration is in clear danger of being wasted.

Under Direct Rule Ministers the duties on public bodies to promote equality of opportunity through regeneration were side-stepped, resulting in the incoherent and inconsistent approach to all the North Belfast Masterplans evidenced in this report. The unaccountable nature of these decisions, and the lack of redress for the consequences, is exactly the kind of scenario which the formation of a devolved administration was designed to avoid.

However even with the Northern Ireland Executive in place, decisions taken about EQIAs on the North Belfast Masterplans have been inconsistent, with the Girdwood Masterplan being subject to an equality analysis prior to Ministerial approval and the unpublished Masterplans requiring Ministerial approval before an EQIA is carried out. While the decision of the Social Development Minister Margaret Ritchie to carry out an EQIA on the Girdwood Masterplan and the North West Quarter Masterplan is to be welcomed, as has been outlined in this report, the current process is seriously flawed.

“...there are strong lessons to be learned, particularly by City Hall but also by Government Departments and agencies, that local communities effectively, in my view, were let down by a process that was supposed to be very much a partnership with the local community and ended up ignoring the local community.”

**–Michael McGimpsey, Belfast City Councillor and MLA for South Belfast about the Gasworks Regeneration**

Ultimately, the rationale for the expenditure of government resources on urban regeneration is to improve the quality of life for those living in local communities. The success with which the proposals address the existing realities of the communities in North Belfast must be the yardstick by which they are measured. Therefore, a responsive, open process which can identify and respond to issues as they arise must be constructed. Such a process

which is capable of delivering change is essential to prevent North Belfast repeating the mistakes of the Gasworks regeneration.

A successful regeneration plan for North Belfast must contain effective and practical proposals tailored to the inequalities and need in the area. Carrying out regeneration in this way is not only what is required by law and policy but, as the Gasworks regeneration evidences, repeating what has been done before will result in a waste of resources and an opportunity lost.

### **What is required?**

- Recognition that the 'more of the same' approach to the North Belfast regenerations has resulted in the current chaotic framework. Legal and policy requirements on equality and objective need must be mainstreamed throughout all plans for regeneration in North Belfast in order to avoid wasting both resources and opportunities.
- A strategic framework for all North Belfast regeneration plans must be developed which sets out how the existing inequalities and deprivation will be targeted through the regenerations, both individually and collectively.
- Informed by the strategic framework, all individual Masterplan proposals should set out practical and effective measures to target inequalities in the area, in conjunction with the other plans.
- A process which encourages and enables affected communities, in particular disadvantaged communities, to participate meaningfully in the design, development, implementation and monitoring of the regenerations in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the Gasworks regeneration.
- Within this process, there must be clear accountability mechanisms to ensure decisions are taken in a transparent and open manner, fully informed and capable of adjustment or redress if and when problems arise.

The fact remains that tackling deprivation and inequality in North Belfast through the regeneration processes as required by law, will demand a cohesive and strategic approach. As this report has shown, not to do so will lead to a fragmented approach which will not deliver the sustainable economic benefits envisaged in the Programme for Government.

Yet this is by no means irreversible.

Approximately 0.06% of the overall budget for the Girdwood regeneration has so far been spent on drawing up the existing plans. In terms of the unpublished plans for Lower Shankill, Lower Falls, Crumlin and Shore Road/York Road, £154,000 has so far been spent in professional fees. The failings of the current plans should therefore be rectified now, before more government resources are wasted on plans and processes that will not deliver change. If it is not rectified, the development of a sustainable society and economy envisaged in the Programmes for Government will be undermined and ultimately, the communities will pay a heavier price.