



Sinn Féin



Mean Fomhair

2007

Sean Martin/Sean Treacy Cumann - Tra Ghearr

• Niall Ó Donnghaile outlines the situation regarding the Sirocco site at this early stage of development

Sirocco land could hold huge potential for this community

The sirocco site on the Short Strand has seen a number of owners since the closure of the factory a number of years ago; while many of us didn't mourn the closure of a company renowned for its sectarian history in employment, we should look positively on the potential that lies ahead with the site.

Many people in the community will have a natural link to the site, remembering the days when homes lined the Short Strand and it was a vibrant and living part of our Parish. The younger of us should look on the site as having outstanding potential for our community in the years ahead.

Since they purchased the site, the Carvill Group has engaged with us and asked for input regarding their planned development; both I and Patrick Devlin, the chairman of St Matthews Housing Association, were nominated by the Short Strand Partnership to engage with the Carvill Group on the issue of Housing. We have had a number of engagements since then during which we presented them with the Study carried out by the University of Ulster on behalf of the Association that concludes that this area needs over 225 Family Homes over the next five years.

Sinn Féin is committed to achieving the necessary amount of homes in order to sustain our community into the future and end the worrying exodus of many young people who are being forced from the area, due to the lack of social homes or the overwhelming costs of mortgages. Sinn Féin will continue to consult with the community, as we did during the recent public meetings held in the Parochial Hall, and we will continue to consult within our own party structures i.e. our Councillors and MLA's, as well as with the

Housing Association and the Housing Executive as how best we can influence and benefit from the development of the Sirocco site. I would once again call on people, particularly young people to make sure their names are on the housing waiting list and that the Short Strand is their preferred option, this is the only way of allocating any housing that may be on the site.

However, due to the scale of this development, housing is not the only issue. The Carvill Group has suggested that the development could take place over a ten year period, that the early figure for living units will be over 2000, that there could be a hotel, restaurants, shops all included in their development. Therefore we should also bear in mind the economic and employment opportunities that lie within the development of the site. This isn't just in terms of jobs that may be created when the site is complete, but that this community, through local tradesmen, through local apprentices, through local talent and ability, should be at the very heart of the development so that we can see and feel a part of the massive potential and benefits that can be formed within the development.

Therefore, while reminding people that none of this is set in stone, we should still be considering our role within the development of the Sirocco site. I have stressed to the owners and



• Niall Ó Donnghaile discusses social housing in East Belfast with Sinn Féin Housing spokesperson Fra McCann MLA.

will continue to do so, that this community has a vital stake in the site and must feel a sense of ownership. As a community we have stood against many adversaries and we should not allow this site to become isolated and removed from ourselves. I have no doubt in my mind that people here will look to the site as a potential place to live and the onus is on the developers to consider the needs of ourselves, the host community, whether they may take the form of housing needs, employment requirements, leisure provision or sporting facilities. Those of us within the Short Strand Partnership, representing the many shades of opinion within the Community have a duty of care to you, the people, and I have no doubt we will continue to endeavour to sustain our community into the future.

The potential is massive and we should be looking to the site positively with a unified approach to making this site something we can all be a part of and more importantly actually be proud of. We do not want to see a repeat of the issues surrounding the development of the old Andersonstown Barracks, where the community have shown they will stand against developments that refuse to take into account the needs, the wishes or the requirements of the host communities.

Therefore I would urge people to continue to engage with community representatives, as nothing regarding this site should be kept behind closed doors. While nothing has been finalised regarding the site, I wanted to take this opportunity to impart the information we in the community sector have.