

McCarson
PA-333/91



**NORTHERN IRELAND
Information Service**

1 April 1998

SECURITY FENCING IN WHITE CITY AREA

Security Minister, Mr Adam Ingram, JP MP, today announced that he has decided on the basis of RUC advice to approve the construction of security fencing in the White City Area of North Belfast.

Mr Ingram said: **"Following a request from the RUC and on the basis of the security advice provided, I have decided to approve the construction of a substantial section of fencing in the Whitewall Road area of North Belfast in order to prevent further sectarian disturbances at this location. I have based my decision solely on the pressing need to maintain the safety of both communities living in this area.**

"I very much regret the need to take such a decision to physically separate these two communities, particularly at a time when we are so close to an agreement on Northern Ireland's future. I believe however, there is no other option available in the circumstances. Since 1 January 1997 the Police have recorded nearly 300 separate incidents in the area, the vast majority of which have been caused by the scourge of sectarianism. Despite strenuous efforts, no alternative solution to this fencing could be identified.

"I am aware that not everyone will agree with my decision. I believe that the measures proposed represent the best way of preserving peace and maintaining order in this area of North Belfast. If a working alternative to this fence can be identified, that would be acceptable to the security forces, I would be happy to look at the situation again.

"It is my strong belief that political agreement will help us to find ways of reducing sectarianism and the fear caused by it. This will not be easily achieved and may not happen as quickly as all of us would wish.

Nevertheless, I look forward to the day when there is no longer a need for such structures in Belfast."

Notes to Editors

Factual Information

The fencing to be constructed will be around 200 metres in length. It has three main sections. The first section will enable Navarra Place to be closed at its junction with Serpentine Road and will consist of a solid 3 metre high cover from view fence. A second section of palisade fencing will secure a sterile area to the rear of Serpentine Gardens and prevent stoning attacks on these homes. The third and longest section of fencing will run from the rear of the houses in Serpentine Gardens into Mulderg Drive, turning 90^o in to Gunnell Hill. This will be made up of 3 metre solid fencing topped with 3 metres of wire mesh. Parts of this section of the fencing will be erected in the rear gardens of residents in Mulderg Drive and Gunnell Hill.

The work will begin later this week and will take some time to complete. The cost will be around £150K. This is the first major construction of a "peaceline" since the erection of the wall and fencing on the Springmartin Road, Belfast which started in September 1994.

General Background

The Northern Ireland Office is responsible for the funding of "peaceline" work, though structures are constructed and repaired primarily on request from the RUC. The necessary authority to build fences and to close roads is contained within Section 26 of the Northern Ireland "Emergency Provisions" Act 1996.

There are a significant number of "peaceline" structures now in the North Belfast area, reflecting the fact that the two communities live in close proximity in many parts of this district. Some are substantial structures such as this proposed between the White City and Serpentine areas, others consist of a few metres of palisade fencing. All are regularly checked and maintained to ensure that they continue to provide security for the communities they seek to protect.