

FROM: MARY BUNTING
29 APRIL 2002

TO: BILL SMITH
WESLEY SHANNON

see copy distribution below

NORTH BELFAST

Meeting with Lower Ardoyne Community on Friday, 26 April

1. On Friday last, Derek Wheeler and I met with representatives of the Lower Ardoyne community to discuss the technical drawings of the proposed road realignment project. The meeting was convened by Gerard McGuigan. Father Troy, Mickey Liggett and a number of representatives of parents from Holy Cross School were in attendance. Bill Morrison and Mary McKee, who have been working as consultants on the project with Derek Wheeler, were present.
2. At the beginning of the meeting concerns were raised by a number of those present, and in particular by Father Troy, about altercations between residents and parents outside Holy Cross School during the week and on-going violence in the evenings. It was clear from the discussion that there was a lot of speculation and rumour concerning the proposed road realignment project. For example, Father Troy said that he had heard that an announcement would be made giving the go ahead to the project on Monday (today) and that if this didn't happen there would be more protests but at Stormont this time. There was suspicion about the willingness of the Glenbryn community to enter into community dialogue if, as it was alleged, they already knew that the road project was going to go ahead. It was also alleged that the Glenbryn community was pressurising Ministers to get their way regardless of the wishes of the Lower Ardoyne community.
3. I emphasised that following my last meeting with Ardoyne community and discussions with local MLAs, OFMDFM Ministers were committed to a process which could result in the sequencing of both the road realignment project and community dialogue in the near future. I also emphasised that Ministers would not permit either community to exercise a veto and that they remained of the view that community dialogue was essential if the problems in the area were to be solved.
4. I explained that following a request from the Lower Ardoyne community we had agreed to make a presentation of the technical aspects of the proposed road realignment project. We had also begun to explore if facilitators could be identified to assist with community dialogue. I

reported that CRUA had invited Derek Wheeler and I to meet with them to discuss 'talks about talks'.

5. The technical drawings and illustrations were presented to those present and discussed with them. While most of those present made it quite clear that they saw no need for the project in the first place, one or two indicated that people at the interface were at their wits end and might benefit from something happening to realign the road. It was also emphasised, however, that anything which further isolated the school was not welcome and that the key issue was to ensure that there were adequate sight lines for parents to view the progress of the walk to the school from the corner of Alliance Avenue/Ardoyne Road.
6. Gerard McGuigan indicated that he did not consider that there were adequate sight lines arising from the height and location of the proposed wall around the Protestant houses at the corner of Alliance Avenue/Ardoyne Road. He explained that it was intended to convene a meeting of people from the area most affected ie those resident at the Alliance/Ardoyne interface and parents of the children in the school to present the proposals to them. It was his view that it would be very difficult to persuade the community to accept the proposal as it stood. After further discussion, it appeared that the key issue of concern was not the realignment of the road as such (although those present were not particularly in favour of this) but the issue of the wall round the houses and its impact on sight lines.
7. We emphasised that the issue of sight lines had been a major element in the consultations with both communities. For its part CRUA had moved from a position of wanting a wall completely across the line of the existing roadway to a position that maintained good sightlines from the Everton side of the Lower Ardoyne Road. They offered this as a major concession to the Holy Cross parents. For its part the Ardoyne community recognised the need for a wall to protect the Protestant property at the interface but they envisaged this wall being tight up against the houses with no access for vehicles behind it. Such a position for the wall is unacceptable to CRUA as it would leave the road completely open and would defeat the need to hamper the activities of young rioters on both sides. It was clear from the discussion that the Holy Cross parents want sightlines maintained from their usual vantage point on the corner of Alliance Avenue up towards the school.
8. Derek and I indicated that we now wished to discuss the matter further with Ministers.

Representations from CRUA

9. Over the past week, Derek Wheeler has received a number of e-mails from Mark Coulter urging progress on the road realignment project, including a note this morning seeking confirmation that CRUA have now agreed the final design and that "the only outstanding matter is the confirmation from OFMDFM that they are instructing contractors to proceed". In addition, Billy Hutchinson issued a press statement last Friday demanding progress, there has been a demonstration in the offices of Fred Cobain MLA and a report in today's Newsletter (which includes one of the drawings from the presentation on the project) that unless the plans are agreed urgently "there is an inevitability of someone losing their life on the Ardoyne Road".

Community Dialogue

10. Following our initial discussions with Bill Shaw and Clem McCartney, they have now advised that they are prepared to act as facilitators. However, Clem McCartney, who has had a number of discussions with CRUA, has advised caution in pursuing CRUA on this until they indicate that they are content for Bill Shaw and him to act as facilitators. Mark Coulter has sought a meeting with Derek Wheeler and I to discuss this and we are trying to arrange this for tomorrow evening. The Lower Ardoyne community have welcomed the steps that have been taken to progress community dialogue but remain suspicious of CRUA's intentions. In discussions with them, I have emphasised that we believe that community dialogue will take place.

Proposed Way Forward

11. There is an Oral AQ listed for this afternoon in the name of Alban Maginness. This may have given rise to speculation that an announcement to proceed with the project would be made this afternoon. The last time this was discussed in the Assembly was on 4 March and at that stage in response to a specific question on when the road realignment project would progress from Billy Hutchinson, the First Minister replied that "As soon as the consultants' design proposals are available, officials will obtain the reaction from both the Glenbryn and Ardoyne representatives. We hope that this will lead to the road realignment project proceeding without interruption".
12. We have now undertaken an extensive consultation exercise on the detail of the project and also sought to address concerns about community dialogue. Both communities are aware, arising from our discussions with

MLAs and with them, that our objective is to bring the project and community dialogue forward in sequence.

13. We believe that Ministers now need to make a decision on the way forward which goes some way to meeting the concerns of both communities. We have considered a number of options.
14. The first option would be for Derek Wheeler and I to continue to try to reach consensus on the issue of sight lines through discussions with CRUA and the Ardoyne community. It is our view that this could give rise to a very negative outcome from CRUA who have a reasonable expectation that the project will be progressed soon.
15. A second option would be to press ahead with the current design and also to strongly emphasise that we expect both communities to begin the process of community dialogue. While this would possibly be well received by CRUA, it is unlikely to meet the Lower Ardoyne community's concerns about sight lines. This community would undoubtedly make public its concerns and complain about meaningful consultation. While this might be manageable, it is important to remember from a public relations point of view that the Holy Cross School community has strong support
16. A third compromise option is that Ministers announce their intention to proceed immediately with work to realign the road and to provide a screen at the back of housing in Hesketh Park and that while this work is progressing they will engage in further discussions with elected and community representatives about the position and height of a protective security screen around housing at the junction of Alliance Avenue and Ardoyne Road.
17. It would also be open to Ministers to indicate that while the work on the road realignment is progressing, they would seek an assurance from both communities that they would engage in dialogue with one another to resolve the issue of the height and position of the wall. Ministers may also wish to announce that they have been exploring the appointment of facilitators to assist with the process of community dialogue and that they expect community leaders and elected representatives to continue to assist them in the process.
18. To move this on, Ministers may wish to outline their thinking in the response to Alban Maginness' AQ, this afternoon and to arrange a series of meetings with elected and community representatives later this week. At these meetings the detail of Ministers' proposals could be explained and final views sought from all parties with a view to work commencing on the project and community dialogue within the following week.

AQ from Alban Maginness for answer today

19. I understand that Derek Wheeler and I will meet Ministers separately today to discuss this matter. To facilitate discussion, a draft response to Alban Maginness' AQ is attached. This is based on the third compromise option at 15/16 above. At this stage no supplementaries are included pending discussion with Ministers.

(sgd) *Mary Bunting*

MARY BUNTING

**THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

*David Trimble, First Minister and
Mark Durkan, Deputy First Minister
Parliament Buildings,
Stormont, Belfast BT4 3XX*

**Mr Alban Maginness MLA
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont**

30 April 2002

AQO 1235/01

Mr Maginness asked:

To ask the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to make a statement on its current work in North Belfast.

ANSWER:

As we have indicated before, we are fully committed to ensuring that all of the measures announced on 23 November last year are progressed as speedily as possible with both communities fully involved in that process. Substantial progress has already been made on a range of measures in the package and we have had extensive discussions with elected and community representatives.

We met recently with the North Belfast Community Action Project Team. They will report to us by the end of May. We look forward to receiving this report. The Project is

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THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

supporting community capacity building activity in various parts of North Belfast including both Glenbryn and Ardoyne.

Over the past few weeks we have been discussing with community leaders and elected representatives how we can develop a process resulting in the sequencing of both community dialogue and the road realignment project at the Ardoyne Road/Alliance Avenue interface in the very near future.

We have engaged in an extensive consultation process with both communities on the proposed road realignment project. The consultants' designs have been made available to both communities and officials have obtained their reactions. We want to make progress. Having given this matter very careful and detailed consideration we would propose to bring the work forward in stages. Work to realign the road and to provide a protective screen to houses in Hesketh Park could be the first stage and this could commence immediately. We also want to have some discussion with both communities on how to provide a protective screen to houses at the Alliance Avenue/Ardoyne interface and to address concerns over sight lines. We want to discuss all these proposals with elected and community representatives and to give them an opportunity to respond. To this end we will be arranging meetings with them later this week.

We have also been exploring how facilitation might be provided to assist with the development of community dialogue. Since we became involved in this area last year, we have continually emphasised that community dialogue is the key to resolving this situation. We recognise that both communities are committed to dialogue and as we have explained in the past, we stand ready to offer assistance to move this forward. We also want to discuss this further with elected and community representatives when we

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meet them later this week with the expectation that community dialogue can be brought forward in tandem with the road realignment project.

He b by

The Rt Hon David Trimble MP MLA

*Approved by the First Minister and
signed in his absence.*

Mark Durkan

Mark Durkan MLA

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