

Justice for Magdalenes Research statement on proposed development at Donnybrook

11th November 2016

Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR) notes the Dublin City Council (DCC) Conservation Office's recommendation to refuse planning permission for the proposed development at the former Magdalene Laundry operated by the Religious Sisters of Charity at Donnybrook. JFMR concurs with DCC's concerns that the proposed development 'has not given sufficient weight to the cultural, historical and conservation significance of the site' and we welcome the Council's request that the applicant 'to clarify if there are any remaining artifacts within these extant buildings which may be of interest to the general public considering [the site's] historical and social past'. However, we are concerned that thus far, DCC does not appear to have facilitated meaningful and inclusive consultation with Magdalene survivors and family members. We are also disappointed that DCC's concerns appear to focus predominantly on historic preservation and aesthetics, with insufficient regard for the women and girls who lived and died in Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry.

In our submission to DCC, JFMR suggested that the proposed development at Donnybrook provided an ideal opportunity for the government to fulfil Mr Justice John Quirke's sixth recommendation in the *Magdalen Commission Report*, around the establishment of a Dedicated Unit, which would (amongst other things) facilitate the '*acquisition, maintenance and administration of any garden, museum or other form of memorial which the Scheme's administrator, after consultation with the advisory body or committee referred to below has decided to construct or establish*'. Judge Quirke said that the committee referred to '*should be broadly representative of the majority of Magdalen women and should include representatives of eligible women currently living within the UK or elsewhere*'. We reiterate our proposal that the Department of Justice immediately make contact with survivors who have expressed an interest in the *ex gratia* scheme to ascertain their views (through a suitably qualified facilitator) on the Donnybrook development, the issue of a memorial, and their needs in terms of what the Dedicated Unit should comprise.

JFMR is also conscious that a number of former Magdalene women are still living in the Donnybrook complex in an institutionalised setting in the custody of the Sisters of Charity. These women are physically closer to the proposed development than any other resident in the Donnybrook area. Their lives were irreparably damaged by the Donnybrook laundry; and as is the case with the vast majority of women we have encountered in similar situations, it is likely that the majority of them were confined as young women or girls, thus spending most of their lives confined within the Magdalene Laundry system. Therefore, absolutely every effort should be made to ensure that this group of women is consulted about what happens at Donnybrook, again, through a suitably qualified facilitator. In the event of any demolition works and subsequent development, it is imperative that the process is explained to them, to ensure that they are not distressed by the changes taking place so close to them.

JFMR is extremely concerned by the findings of the *Archaeological Assessment* at the proposed development site at Donnybrook. Research conducted as part of JFMR's Magdalene Names Project has revealed that at least 312 women are interred in the graveyard adjacent to the proposed development at Donnybrook. In our submission, JFMR requested that DCC add a condition to any permission granted, whereby if any human remains are discovered on the site, that all demolition works will be immediately stopped and suitable experts are brought in to examine the site and ascertain the identity of those who are interred there and what became of them. It is now 23 years since the High Park exhumations, and we fear that during this year of commemorations, we are in danger of repeating history if this issue is not dealt with appropriately and sensitively. We hope that DCC takes this into account as the application for the development at Donnybrook progresses.