



Maeve O'Rourke

Ireland's last Magdalene

Katherine O'Donnell

1 October 2018 at 13:46

To: info@graftonarchitects.ie, admin@graftonarchitects.ie

Cc: Gary Gannon

Maeve O'Rourke

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Dear Grafton,

I'm writing on behalf of Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR). We are a small group of academic/activists who since 2009 have been advocating on behalf of the Survivors of Ireland's Magdalene Institutions (my JFMR colleague Maeve O'Rourke is cc.d here).

You may have noticed that Dublin City Councillors have recently backed a motion by Cllr. Gary Gannon (cc.d here) not to sell a site in Seán McDermott St (of over 2 acres) to a Japanese budget hotel chain. The historic (and moving) meeting of DCC can heard here (at 1:13:30): https://dublincity.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/370101

The Councillors overwhelmingly recognise that to take the site of the former Magdalene Laundry (which closed in 1996) out of public ownership would be to lose the opportunity to have a site of public conscience at the heart of the area that has suffered most since the foundation of our State. The issue now remains as to what should be done with the site.

We in JFMR find ourselves in a budding coalition with many concerned groups and community leaders who are beginning to articulate a shared vision for the site which we can clearly see could lead to the first successful 'regeneration' of this quarter of our inner city following other failed attempts. We have been encouraged by DCC officials to make our vision more manifest in a draft plan.

In our vision we are able to imagine a regeneration that actively resists gentrification and honours the history of the Monto; the streets and docks where most of the Republican (Feminist & Socialist) Revolutionaries lived and Ireland's Twentieth Century Cultural Revival was made manifest. Yet a development of this area must be sensitive to the reality that this is the neighbourhood that suffered most under Ireland's new establishment from the time of the Legion of Mary's crusade through the Monto in the 1920s, the subsequent domination in the literal and metaphorical landscape of the punitive Magdalene, and to the widespread incarceration and oppression of the area's impoverished women and their children. By the 1950s 1% of the Irish population was held in religious-run residential institutions although in the neighbourhood of Seán McDermott St there is a disproportionately large population of Ireland's survivors of institutional abuse.

We hope that a development of the site will include a 'site of conscience, that is an interpretive centre and living archive whereby citizens and visitors can engage in encountering the dark heritage yet also be challenged and empowered to co-create an inclusive collaborative future. We hope that the development will provide beautiful housing for older community members and those who want to make a community of participant citizens.

We have been working with the private owners of the Donnybrook Magdalene who have facilitated us in bringing contemporary archaeologists on site to make extensive surveys and have donated the contents of the building to the National Museum who have agreed to make formal acquisitions on behalf of the State. We have an internationally experienced group of 'heritage management' experts who are keen to assist us in designing the interpretive centre and providing grounded figures of economic costs and benefits. As momentum builds around us to actualise this vision, we realise that the immediate next step is to request the help of architects

so that we could visualise the plans, make costings for the development so that we are best placed to lobby and search for funding. Mr. Brendan Kenny, Dublin City Manager has promised some initial funding in this regard to making drawings although to be frank, the sum is not generous.

To be even more forthright: we would love if you could find the time to meet with Gary, Maeve and me in City Hall to hear about what we envisage the site might be. To say that we would be delighted if Grafton was able to work on plans for the site would be an understatement (you are our favourite architects) and we are keenly aware that in presenting this wish we are effectively asking you to work in hopes of your fees being paid once funding is secured— which at best is unorthodox — but we find ourselves in an unorthodox moment.

We very much hope to hear from you,
Best wishes
Katherine

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