



JUSTICE FOR MAGDALENES RESEARCH

Justice for Magdalenes Research Statement

**Re: Development at the site of the former Magdalene Laundry at High Park
20th September 2021**

On 6th July 2021, Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR) was contacted by Ciaran Gormley of Bennett Construction, the developer involved in the construction on the grounds of the former Magdalene Laundry at High Park. Mr Gormley was seeking guidance/approval from JFMR on the proposed names for the housing development.

JFMR responded to Mr Gormley on 9th July.¹ We stated that:

... while the directors of JFMR have trusted relationships with a number of Magdalene survivors, all of whom are a source of constant guidance to us in our work, our organisation is not a 'representative group'. With this in mind, while we are very happy to provide the below observations for your information, those observations should not be construed as 'approval' of the name chosen for the development.

Dublin City Council (DCC) had suggested a number of possible names for the development, including 'Phelan Place', which came about as a result of a *Historical Naming Report* by Eneclann, which provided information on a Mary Bridget Phelan who died at High Park. JFMR provided information about Mary's death and clarified that she was buried in an unmarked grave in Glasnevin Cemetery at the time of her death (see page 3 of our letter).

JFMR also raised our concerns about the possibility of further human remains that may be still interred at the site where St Mary's Graveyard once stood. In particular, we were concerned that the southern end of the site had not been adequately examined for evidence of human remains (see pages 4-7 of our letter). On 9th July, Mr Gormley responded to our letter stating that:

In relation to the previous dig noted – in our review of the documents which were available to us during the tender process, we also felt there was an area which the previous dig did not fully address to the southern end of the car park. Through IAC, we applied for a licence and carried out further investigations in April of 2021.

IAC will also have a watching brief during any planned excavations.

¹ http://jfmresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/JFMR-Letter-to-Bennett-Construction_09-07-21_Public.pdf

Mr Gormley provided JFMR with the report from IAC, which is available [here](#).² Claire McGettrick also had a telephone conversation with Mr Gormley on 13th July 2021. Mr Gormley assured Ms McGettrick that an archaeologist would be present for the entirety of any excavations on the site and that he would keep JFMR informed.

JFMR appreciates the efforts of Bennett Construction to ensure that any additional human remains are located. However, there are further significant issues relating to the site under construction that must be immediately addressed by the State. The land was originally the location of St Mary's Graveyard, the burial ground from which 155 women were exhumed in 1993 in order to make way for a separate development. In our recent publication, *[Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries: A Campaign for Justice](#)*, JFMR has demonstrated that DCC and the Department of the Environment were aware that the vast majority of the names on the exhumation licence did not match the identities of the women who were being exhumed. In fact, only 32 of 133 names matched the exhumation licence. A further twenty-two remains were completely unidentifiable. Relying on research commissioned by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity and directed by Dr Jacinta Prunty, the McAleese Committee declared in 2013 that all 155 exhumed women were accounted for. However, JFMR has shown that this assertion is untrue because Dr Prunty's research is deeply flawed.

Therefore, while the naming of the housing development at High Park should be carried out with the utmost sensitivity, there are far more pressing matters requiring the immediate attention of DCC and central government. As a matter of priority, the State must now:

- Establish an investigation into the exhumations so that all 155 exhumed women can be accounted for;
- Ensure that there are no further human remains at the High Park site;
- Open the McAleese archive held in the Department of the Taoiseach;
- Expedite the preservation of the former Magdalene Laundry site at Sean McDermott Street in preparation for the establishment of a National Site of Conscience (which includes a dedicated archive to encourage 'active memorialisation' to ensure that a line is not drawn under 'historical' abuses).

² http://jfmresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/IAC-Archaeological-Assessment_11-05-2021.pdf