

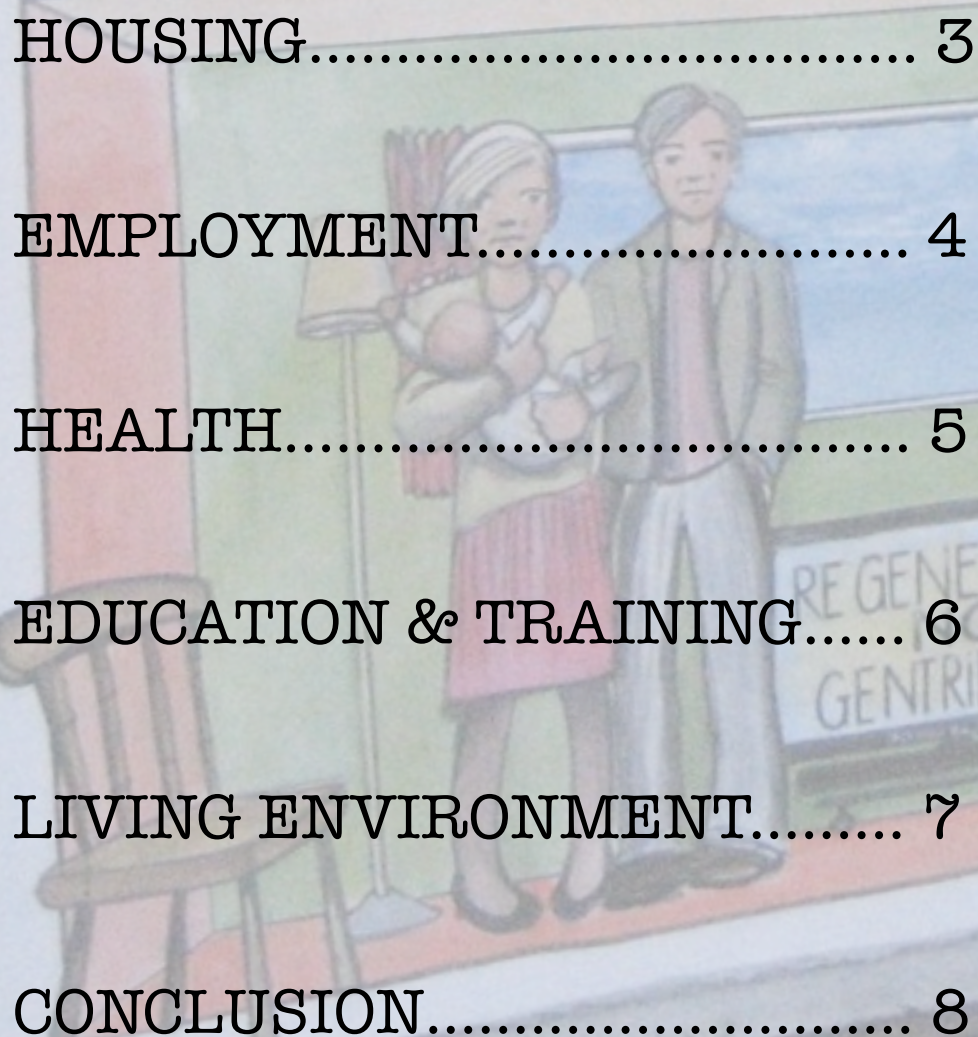
LOWER SHANKILL REGENERATION BOARD



RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT PHYSICAL REGENERATION CONCEPT MASTERPLAN

FEBRUARY 2010

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The responses in this document were produced by residents of the Lower Shankill at two DSD consultation (25 & 26 November 2009) events and two community workshops (25 & 27 January 2010).

All statistics in this response are taken from the 2001 Census, 2005 Multiple Deprivation Measure, NIHE Belfast District Housing Plan and Local Housing Strategy 2009-2010, DETI 2008, DSD 2008, DHSSPS 2007, Health Statistics Quarterly 31 2006,

YOUR

HOUSING

PROPOSALS

Most of your housing proposals are not about the inside of the estate. They are mostly private flats along Shankill and Crumlin Roads:

- **Take land** on either side of the Courthouse (by Compulsory Purchase Order), **knock down houses in Florence** and build cafes, bars, restaurants, parking, etc.
- New housing on **KFC** and **old car wash** sites
- **Studio apartments** between **Townsend Street** and **Westlink**
- Mix of **social and private housing** above shops and offices at the junction of **Townsend St** and **the Shankill**
- Replace **Agnes St Industrial Estate** with housing
- Social and private housing included in the **Courthouse**



OUR NEEDS AND INEQUALITIES

- Lower Shankill is in the **top 10% most deprived Living Environment** (including housing) in Northern Ireland
- In the entire Shankill **the elderly wait on average over 5 years** on the waiting list
- There are about **25 people in housing stress** on the Lower Shankill

What WE said...

"NOBODY ASKED ME WHAT I WANTED..."

"WE DON'T WANT FENCED IN WITH HIGH-RISE FLATS AND FENCES... WE NEED TO FIX THINGS ON THE INSIDE."

Residents were angry that this plan will not improve the existing housing on the inside of the estate. Some houses in the estate (especially Foster & Malvern Street) have chronic damp problems. Residents complained of the poor quality of PVC windows which were installed a number of years ago and continue to present problems to residents. The conditions are made worse by the NIHE's current policy of not doing all required maintenance work due to shortage of money.

Although the DSD said it was inconsistent with 'Urban Design Principles', residents expressed their desire to have housing on the front of the Shankill Road, similar to the social housing on the Antrim Road and North Queen Street.

The number of voids currently in the area (particularly in Florence & Hopewell) brought down the character of the area, encouraged vandalism, and residents asked why the NIHE were not filling these properties.

Many residents complained of not being involved in the process at all. For example, a number of residents from the Florence area were shocked that their houses were to be knocked down and replaced by restaurants, bars, cafes, parking, etc. Many of these houses contain families with young children.

Overall, residents do not accept these housing proposals. The vast majority will not bring any benefit to the existing community, but are aimed at 'professionals' with money who will benefit from city centre apartments. They will not build or sustain a community. In fact, the most vulnerable in our community: the elderly, single mothers, young children, jobless households, will be disadvantaged due to the displacement at Florence and the continuing failure to address the existing housing need across the estate.

LOWER SHANKILL HOUSING FACTS:

- There are just over **1000 houses** in the Lower Shankill
- About **860** of these houses are **rented**
- Roughly **778 Houses** are **owned by the NIHE** in the Lower Shankill:
 - 106 Bungalows
 - 80 Flats
 - 592 Houses
- About **260** of these houses are **pensioner households**
- About **14%** of the homes are owner occupied There are **44 'voids'** (most - 39 - in the Florence Court/Hopewell area)

YOUR

EMPLOYMENT

PROPOSALS

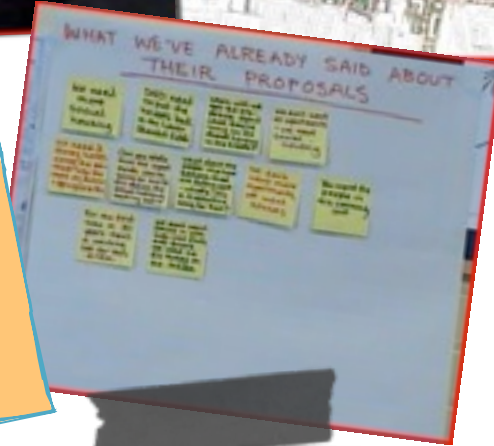
There are employment opportunities (both during construction and afterwards) at the following sites:

- **New shops** on the Crumlin Road facing the Gaol & Mater
- **Shops and business** on the ground floor at junction of **Townsend St and Shankill**
- **“Community facilities”/park** at St Michaels
- **Courthouse Development**
- **Relocation** of businesses from **Agnes St Industrial Estate** to Hillview Enterprise Park
- **Restaurants, bars and cafes** on Crumlin Road
- **New shops and businesses** along the Shankill Road
- **‘Doing up’ the fronts** of some existing shops on Shankill Road



OUR NEEDS AND INEQUALITIES

- The Lower Shankill is in the **highest 2% of Income Support** claimants across NI. This is mostly females
- The Shankill is in the **highest 3% of Long Term Unemployed** claimants across NI. This is mostly males.



What WE said...

“HOW ARE YOU GOING TO GUARANTEE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE, WHO DON'T HAVE OPPORTUNITIES, WILL BE ABLE TO GET JOBS?”

“THE COURTHOUSE SHOULD BE A TRAINING AND COMMUNITY FACILITY - WHERE RESIDENTS CAN GET EDUCATION IN COMPUTERS, TRADES, THE LAW, ART - A WHOLE RANGE OF SKILLS.”

Two main points were clear from all of the meetings held with residents:

- **Lower Shankill residents need good training and employment opportunities**
- **the proposals in the Masterplan do not even try to meet the needs of the community**

Some residents said that if the work was going to bring benefit to the local community, proper training would have to take place well in advance of the work starting to make sure residents had the skills needed. The jobs provided would have to be good jobs - not like government schemes, like New Deal or Steps to Work - where people are underpaid and don't end up with jobs.

Affordable childcare was also a major issue for women, who made the point that the jobs available to people in the community did not allow them to afford childcare. The actual availability of childcare places was also an issue.

Some objections were raised to the moving of existing businesses which provide employment: KFC and Agnes St Industrial Estate. And it was noted that existing shops were empty on Northumberland St and attention should be paid to filling them before building more.

FACTS ABOUT THE DRAFT MASTERPLAN:

The type of jobs available through this plan include: **labouring, various trades, domestics, administration, catering, service, managerial,** and others.

Despite this, there are **no plans to recruit long-term unemployed** or other disadvantaged residents into either full time jobs, part time jobs, or apprenticeships. If such plans could promote equality, which it obviously could, the law says the government must do this.

In **September 2009**, the Equality Commission made this point to the Department for Social Development. **It does not seem that they paid any attention to the advice they got.**

YOUR HEALTH PROPOSALS

There is no proposal in the Draft Masterplan which directly aims to improve the health of the residents. Instead your proposals are about relocating existing services. The plan proposes to:

- identify somewhere to **relocate the Mater Hospital's temporary buildings** on the Crumlin Road
- **relocate the Crumlin Road Health Centre to Crumlin Road/ Florence Square** frontage



OUR NEEDS AND INEQUALITIES

- When it comes to **health**, the Lower Shankill is the **most deprived area in NI**
- Over **1 out of every 3 residents** in the Shankill have a **limiting long-term illness**
- **Life expectancy** for males and females on the Shankill is around **10 years less** than the NI average
- Out of 645 Parliamentary Constituencies in the UK, the Shankill is in **13th highest** (W Belfast) for **suicide rates**.

What WE said...

"I HAVE AN AUTISTIC SON. NONE OF YOUR PAPERWORK ADDRESSES MY NEEDS OR THE IMPACT ON MY LIFE."

"THE PROPOSALS IN THIS PLAN COULD SPLIT MY FAMILY UP AND MY HEALTH COULD NOT STAND THAT. YET NOBODY SPOKE TO ME."

There was general disgust that while the Lower Shankill experiences so many health problems, a multi-million pound plan for the area has failed to even look at the health needs of the community.

Residents listed a long number of current health problems in the community: rat infestation, poor cleansing throughout the community, the long waiting list for specialist appointments (eg podiatry), lack of responsive mental health services, among others. **To leave these untouched while money is invested on the outside of the estate is unacceptable.**

Residents also raised how conditions in the community impacted on their health: lack of jobs and affordable childcare which could both improve someone's health was mentioned, the lack of opportunities for children and teenagers creates unhealthy relationships between adults and young people, and the neglect of vacant and derelict properties (particularly the Courthouse) has exacerbated an already unhealthy environment.

YOUR

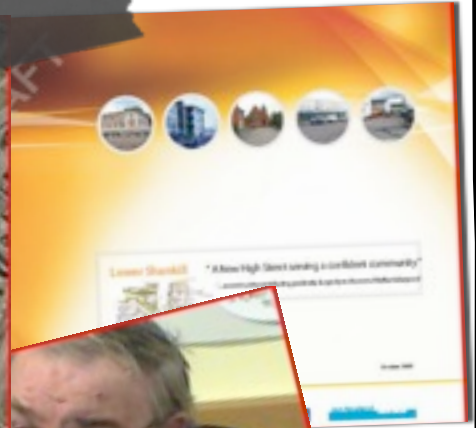
EDUCATION

&

TRAINING

PROPOSALS

There is not a **SINGLE** proposals in the entire Masterplan which will help address the education and training needs of our community.



What WE said...

"WE'RE NOT WORRIED ABOUT THE COURTHOUSE. WHAT ABOUT ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT?"

"THERE'S NO CHANCE OF SUSTAINING THE LOCAL SCHOOL IF NEW HOUSES FOR FAMILIES AREN'T BUILT INSTEAD OF PRIVATE APARTMENTS."

Residents' linked the issue of educational achievement and success very closely with the well being and future of the the Lower Shankill community.

Many residents focused on the need for better school facilities. The local school has been there for over 50 years with little work done to it in that time. The building itself is in poor condition. There is a lack of dedicated and specialised support provision for kids in school. Additionally, there is no 'after-school' programmes which local kids can take part in - IT, dance, photography, etc.) The places where these are available are outside of the estate and parents worry about children travelling to and from these places.

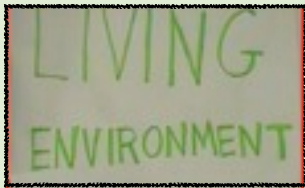
While many focused on the formal school system, others looked at training and education more broadly. A number of residents emphasised that education takes place outside of the the school setting. The lack of opportunities for children and young people in the estate leads to boredom and lack of physically and intellectually stimulating places to play and interact. This was supported by children themselves who noted that you had to literally leave the community to do something of interest (cinema, amusements, good play parks, shops, etc.)

Relating the education to employment, many comments were made about the lack of skilled trades training for those who don't go on to higher education. This goes hand in hand with the lack of real apprenticeships. Some training is offered to certain areas which excludes residents from the Shankill (eg CSR training for 'North Belfast residents only'). Such training and employment opportunities brings real benefit to the community, not only in terms of income, but also in terms of confidence.

OUR NEEDS AND INEQUALITIES

- Only **2.7%** of residents in the Shankill (aged 16-74) have a **degree level or higher qualification**. The NI average is 15.8%
- In 2007/08 **no residents** from the Shankill received a **Higher Education Qualification**.
- **87%** of residents (aged 16-74) have **no/low level qualification**

YOUR



PROPOSALS

Your proposals to improve the Living Environment focus on the routes into the city centre with some additional facilities mentioned:

- “community facilities” beside the Shankill Women’s Centre
- New park at St Michael’s with children’s play area
- Parking behind the shops on the front of the Shankill, or as “undercroft” parking
- Better and new lighting from North Street up
- “street furniture” along the Shankill
- Four new pedestrian crossings on Shankill Rd
- Trees planted along the footpaths on Shankill Rd
- Grass on Northumberland St
- Some type of public art at Peter’s Hill
- “shared space”
- “good public realm” that’s easy to access
- Community safety by design



What WE said...

“WE NEED REGULAR, EFFECTIVE CLEANSING OF STREETS AND OPEN SPACES, AND DEMOLITION OR OCCUPANCY OF DERELICT HOUSES.”

“PLAY EQUIPMENT NEEDS TO BE MORE STIMULATING THAN SWINGS AND SLIDES. THERE’S NOT ANYTHING NICE TO LOOK AT.”

“I HAVE MAJOR CONCERNS ABOUT A BUSY TRAFFIC ROUTE THROUGH THE ESTATE CONNECTING THE CRUMLIN TO SHANKILL ROADS, ESPECIALLY AS WE ARE TRYING TO GET MORE SPEED BUMPS PUT IN RIGHT NOW.”

Input from children and young people indicated that what was required was more than a conventional ‘park’, particularly as the Lower Shankill currently has three ‘park’ areas. Rather they wanted somewhere to come together for entertainment (cinema, amusement, go-karts, etc.), physical activity (skating, cycling), and to socialise. Residents stated that the existing facilities have limited opening hours, and the lack of opportunities creates an environment which does not promote constructive activity.

It was noted that there is nothing in the plans to improve provisions for people with learning disabilities and residents were concerned about the opening the estate up to busy traffic running through the estate by linking the Crumlin and Shankill Roads.

Again, residents were rightfully concerned with the inside of the estate and current problems around cleansing, derelict properties, and traffic speed. A female resident with children said that whoever came up with this masterplan needed to realise that its not enough to make a ‘public realm’ “attractive”, it’s got to be “livable”. The masterplan proposes to ‘do-up’ the ‘outside’ of the estate and ignoring the ‘inside’ - exactly where the community needs change.

OUR NEEDS AND INEQUALITIES

- Lower Shankill is in the **top 10% most deprived Living Environment** in Northern Ireland
- **Out of 890** areas in NI, Shankill is rated **63rd worse for outdoor physical environment**
- **1 out of 5 residents** living in the Lower Shankill has had their **house vandalised**

CONCLUSION

Residents from the Lower Shankill have been fighting for proper regeneration of our community for almost ten years. We have a right to decent housing. We have a right to relevant training and sustainable employment. We have a right to the highest standard of health and a right to good education that increases our life opportunities. The regeneration of our community, and the millions of pounds of investment that will go along with it, is an ideal way to really begin addressing the neglect our community has experienced for decades.

However, we have constantly been let down.

The recent plan by the DSD is the latest 'plan' in a line of 'false dawns'. There was Whittaker and Watt (2002), NIHE Shankill Strategy (2004), Buchanan's (2007), and now the DSD Physical Regeneration Concept Masterplan (2009).

All the previous plans were drawn up in times when the economy was growing. But we were told to wait. We waited. Nothing came.

Then the economy went into recession, and now we are being 'given' this new plan - a plan which, along with four other plans, was two years in the making and costed around £180,000 of public money before a single resident was allowed to see what was inside it. The exclusion of residents from drawing up the plan is reflected in the fact that pressing needs and inequalities in the Lower Shankill are ignored in the proposals. The very fact that the clearly residential parts of our community are ignored in the plan - or completely left out as is the case with the streets and housing around Shankill Leisure Centre - merely goes to show that the DSD had not intended this plan to benefit our community.

The Lower Shankill did not benefit during the so-called 'boom' years, and we should not be the ones whose rights are the first to be sacrificed to sort out an economic crisis we didn't create. Moreover, millions of pounds of public money should not be invested in projects that do not show how our community, and communities like ours, will benefit. That not only makes good economic sense - it is also the law.

If it is implemented, the DSD plan for the Lower Shankill is doomed to repeat the failures of the past and the gap between the prosperous and the poor will grow larger and larger.

Despite the 'false dawns' and the exclusion of residents from developing the recent plan, this consultation response brings together the voices of hundreds of residents across the Lower Shankill who, since May 2009, have turned out to public meetings, attended consultations and workshops, distributed leaflets and posters, and filled in surveys. Our commitment and determination to address the needs and inequalities in our community is clear. All we are asking is that same commitment and determination be shown by the DSD and other public bodies responsible for regenerating our community.

That will require a different plan than the one that's being forced on us by the DSD.