

David Birch
c/o Ards Borough Council
2 Church Street
Newtownards
BT23 4AP

5 March 2010

Dear Mr Birch

PUBLIC CONSULTATION – NEWTOWNARDS MASTERPLAN

The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) was established in 1981 and is an independent non-governmental organisation affiliated to the International Federation of Human Rights. CAJ works on a broad range of human rights issues and its membership is drawn from across the community. Its activities include - publishing reports, conducting research, holding conferences, monitoring, campaigning locally and internationally, individual casework and providing legal advice.

CAJ's areas of work are extensive and include policing, emergency laws, criminal justice, equality and the protection of rights. The organisation has been awarded several international human rights prizes, including the Reebok Human Rights Award and the Council of Europe Human Rights Prize. Together with UNISON, we co-convene the Equality Coalition.

For some time CAJ has been involved in the process of furthering the mainstreaming of equality in Northern Ireland and we are keen to forward our views on as many equality related documents as possible. This is particularly the case where the documents concerned have important implications for the delivery of greater equality.

CAJ believes that the Newtownards Masterplan is one such document, and we are keen to contribute to any discussions on how the area concerned can most effectively be subject to regeneration. CAJ is of the view that regeneration, inward investment, and public procurement should all be linked to provide maximum benefit both in social and economic terms.

The Newtownards Masterplan represents an unprecedented opportunity to have a significant, positive impact on the promotion of equality across all the Section 75 dimensions. For example, the project could create employment, apprenticeships and on-site training to assist in skills development for those in most need. It is therefore not clear to CAJ why an Equality Impact Assessment ('EQIA') has not taken place prior to the issuing of the consultation document.

CAJ would like confirmation that the Department for Social Development will conduct an EQIA for the Newtownards Masterplan. The key issue for the EQIA would be ensuring that this project's potential to promote equality of opportunity is realised. We therefore also seek confirmation that an EQIA would inform DSD's decision making in relation to this project, despite taking place after the general public consultation.

Finally, we are concerned by the inconsistent posting of the closing date for this consultation. On the face of the Newtownards Town Centre Master Plan, it states that '*[t]his consultation runs for a period of 8 weeks until 5th of March 2010*' (at page 1)ⁱ. However, on the DSD website, the consultation is already archived and the commentary states that '*[t]his consultation will remain until 2 March 2010*'ⁱⁱ.

This lack of transparency and accessibility could clearly hinder public input to the consultation process. Please could you confirm that DSD will accept consultation responses arriving after 2 March 2010 and alert its consultees to the inaccurate closing date on the DSD website.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Debbie Kohner

Equality Programme Officer
Committee on the Administration of Justice

ⁱ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/22423_newtownards_masterplan_boards_final_lo_res.pdf

ⁱⁱ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/consultations/archived__consultations2/consultation-masterplans-n_ards.htm