



pprproject 

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**Participation and the  
Practice of Rights (PPR)**

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Councillor Arder Carson  
Chair, Planning Committee  
Democratic Services Section  
Room 123B  
City Hall  
Belfast  
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By e-mail: [chloe@pprproject.org](mailto:chloe@pprproject.org)

30<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Dear Councillor Carson and members of the Planning Committee,

I am writing to advise you about the work of the Take Back the City (TBTC) coalition, an innovative collaboration between PPR, Queen's University Belfast School of Architecture, Maynooth University and the Town and Country Planning Association. The coalition has been working together with housing activists to progress the development of social, public and co-operative housing across the city of Belfast, particularly in areas of high housing need.

A key focus for our work is the development of a prototype community on the site of the former Mackie's factory in West Belfast. Almost half of this 61 acre site is owned by the Department of Communities, with a significant amount of vacant land available to build good-quality, sustainable public housing in line with the following model:

1. Co creation in design: communities working with professionals to design their own future.

2. Local employment and skills to ensure that the development process helps build local skills and keeps investment in the local community. The final design will create local workspace and opportunities for home working.

3. A healthy place to ensure our community prioritises walking and cycling, access to parks and gardens and opportunities for growing and exchanging local food.

4. A climate-ready place to ensure that our community will be zero carbon and, if possible, energy positive. It will use sustainable urban drainage and green spaces to manage flood risk, create urban cooling, and enhance biodiversity.

5. An inclusive place to ensure our new community is open to everyone, meeting the needs of diverse people across their whole lifetime by ensuring a mixed community, with emphasis on shared community meeting spaces.

6. A self-managed community framed by a model of long-term community stewardship, so that the homes and assets will be used for benefit of residents over the long term.

Last week (June 24<sup>th</sup>), the coalition held a highly successful and well-attended public event to discuss approaches to building a sustainable Belfast in the context of sectarian interfaces and the challenges of climate change. The event was chaired by Rory Hearne, Assistant Professor at Maynooth University and author of 'Housing Shock.' Other speakers included Grainia Long, Chief Executive of the NIHE and Minister Nichola Mallon, who confirmed that plans in progress for a greenway across the site would not preclude the building of public/social housing on Mackie's.

In addition, we were fortunate to hear from Mr Alistair Reid, Director of Place and Economy at Belfast City Council, who informed us of the Council's plans with respect to planning, economic growth and the upcoming consultation on the Belfast Agenda. Mr Reid confirmed to the coalition that any decision relating to the future use of the Mackie's site lay in the hands of elected politicians. With that in mind, we are pleased to invite members of the Planning Committee to attend a walkabout at the Mackie's site in order to assess the site's potential for addressing housing need for yourselves. Please do let us know when would suit members best. Our staff will be available at your convenience.

I am also pleased to advise that one of our coalition partners, Hugh Ellis, Policy Director at the Town and Country Planning Association is in the process of designing and delivering a number of workshops to explore some of the key issues in developing social housing in Belfast, on themes such as sustainability, planning, financing and contested spaces. Mr Ellis is an expert in planning policy and is particularly interested in the role of planning in addressing poverty and climate crisis. We would like to extend an invitation to all members to attend these workshops. Mr Ellis is keen that these are as useful and practical as possible, and therefore if members have any suggestions as to fruitful topics of discussion, he will be happy to accommodate this.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Chloë Trew".

Chloë Trew  
Director, PPR, on behalf of the Take Back the City Coalition.