

Social
Democrats

Holly CAIRNS TD

Representing West Cork



Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2
12th Jan 2021

RE: 308790: Bessboro, Ballinure, Blackrock, Cork

To whom it may concern,

I am objecting to the planned construction of a strategic housing development of 179 no. residential units over 3 no. apartment buildings ranging in height from 5 to 7 storeys and all ancillary site works, a component of application ref. 308790, by MWB Two Ltd. It is disgraceful that such an application is proposed on the site of the former Bessborough Mother and Baby home. Given the nature of this site, the unaccounted remains of hundreds of babies, and the development's vicinity to the 'Childrens' Burial Ground', I believe it is a highly inappropriate proposal. For technical and moral reasons, this application must be halted.

The proposed development is not sensitive to the surroundings due to its location near the known burial ground at the site. The human rights abuses and violence associated with Mother and Baby Homes means any developments on or adjacent to these locations need to be conscious of their history and be respectful of the spaces as commemorative and traumatic landscapes. The 'Children's Burial Ground', as one of the few locations where it is known remains are located, is a focal point for remembrance, any new builds should not encroach on this space or the capacity of individuals to pay their respects there.

There is also a likelihood that there are unmarked burial places on the estate. The Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation states that:

It is not known where the vast majority of the children who died in Bessborough are buried. There is a small burial ground in the grounds of Bessborough...It seems to have been assumed by former residents and advocacy groups that this is also where the children who died in Bessborough are buried...The vast majority of children who died in Bessborough are not buried there; it seems that only one child is buried there. **More than 900 children died in Bessborough** or in hospital after being transferred from



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Bessborough. Despite very extensive inquiries and searches, the Commission has been able to establish the burial place of only 64 children.¹ [Emphasis added]

And:

The Commission considers that it is likely that some of the children are buried in the grounds but has been unable to find any physical or documentary evidence of this.²

Bearing this information in mind, without a full survey of the estate, it would be not only highly inappropriate to build in the area, but also a further insult to the survivors and their families. The Cork Survivors and Supporters Alliance have made the reasonable request that the planning application be withdrawn pending further investigation.

The State has a history of facilitating the worst kinds of abuse in these institutions and in recent months has unnecessarily compounded the suffering caused to survivors of Mother and Baby Homes. As a state body, you must not only be cognisant of this, but are morally obliged to oppose this development. It is essential that the planning process responds to their concerns and halts the development until a full and satisfactory survey of the site is completed.

In addition, there are technical reasons that make the proposed development inappropriate. Cork City Council's *Mahon Local Area Plan* notes that 'Bessboro House, Bessboro Farm and demesne – one of only two relatively intact historic landscapes left in the city'.³ The development will irreparably damage this landscape and contravenes the plans intention to 'Conserve and enhance landscape assets...and use them to create a strong sense of place and contribute to amenities in the area'⁴

In summary, the application should be rejected until:

- The application is modified to consider how best to be respectful of the 'Childrens' Burial Ground'
- A full survey of the site is complete
- Survivors are fully consulted and agree with the suitability of the development

Please contact me if you have any questions,



Holly Cairns TD

¹ Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation (2019) *Fifth interim report*, p.8

² *Ibid*, pg.9.

³ Cork City Council (2014) *Mahon Local Area Plan*, pg.10

⁴ *Ibid*, pg.20



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