



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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To: HQ  
For: Secretary Gallagher

From: Belfast  
From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Office and staff accommodation following closure of Maryfield

1. As you know, we have been engaged in intensive house-hunting here for premises to replace Maryfield with effect from the end of the year. We need new office space, for use initially by the Anglo-Irish Secretariat and later by the British-Irish Secretariat, and we need private accommodation for our staff.
2. As regards the office space, the Danesfort option has had to be discounted. A US investor, All-State Insurance, has outbid the British Government in its approaches to Viridian, the company who own the building. They are willing to pay a higher rent and to take a larger portion of the building and have prevailed in the competitive bidding with the British Government.
3. Accordingly, we have been looking at another building, Windsor House, which is located in the city centre (on Bedford Street which is immediately adjacent to Donegall Square). Following a number of visits, and consultation with the Architect, Mr McSwiney, we are satisfied that Windsor House is at least as good an option as Danesfort, and in several respects better.
4. It is a well-known 21-floor office building, about twenty-five years old and with a very convenient city-centre location which is politically neutral. It houses a mix of public-sector and private-sector tenants. Current occupants include the Parades Commission, the Sentence Review Commissioners (as of a fortnight ago), the NI Court Service, the DPP's Office and the European Commission office in Belfast.
5. The intention would be to locate the Secretariat on two-and-a-half floors of the building which are due to become vacant in the next month or two. Our provisional thinking is that the Irish side of the Secretariat would take the thirteenth floor, the

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*cc: PPA/PPA*  
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*Also to Coakley & Harriet*  
*de McParadise*  
*Connelley*

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fourteenth floor would be used for official dinners and receptions and the British side would use the twentieth floor (most of which will become available). The offices are in good condition but would require substantial redesigning and refurbishment before we move in.

6. The security arrangements at the building are satisfactory. All visitors must report to a reception desk and are collected by staff from the relevant offices. Access to the Secretariat floors would be controlled by swipe-card arrangements. Access to the building would be possible in the evening and at weekends by prior arrangement with the building management. Limited parking facilities are available in a garage adjacent to the entrance which is also security-controlled.
7. The floor for our side would accommodate offices for the current staff plus secretarial and conference facilities. Similar provision would be made for the British side. The Secretariat would carry out its official hospitality programme on a floor which would include a formal dining-room with lounge, a purpose-built kitchen and extensive reception space. (One of the building's assets is that it offers commanding views of Belfast from the upper floors). Day-to-day catering for the Irish side would also be arranged here.
8. Preliminary plans for the redesigning of the three floors are being drawn up here and Mr McSwiney will be coming up next week to discuss these with the NIO's architect. Contact with the respective landlords will also be required. One of the floors will become available in early December with the other two following by the end of the month. It is hoped that the refurbishment work on all three floors would be completed by the end of February. This would necessitate a degree of improvisation for the January/February period. The current plan is that our side would move onto the twentieth floor in the first instance (as this will be ready soonest) and that the British side would use temporary facilities on one of the other floors.
9. Assuming that the negotiations on Windsor House reach an outcome which is satisfactory to all concerned, we envisage the following timetable for the move from Maryfield. The British have set Friday 18 December as their target date for leaving the building. We have indicated that, not least with a view to avoiding disruption and inconvenience for staff over the Christmas period, we envisage remaining here until 31 December. The British are content with this but it may be that they will

3/4

3

begin their own move in some form as from Monday 21 December. Whatever the practical arrangements, the normal Secretariat operation will be assured over the Christmas period. We would move to the new premises with effect from 1 January.

10. As regards our personal accommodation, Paul Murphy mentioned to David Trimble some time ago a scenario under which the Irish side would continue to reside at Maryfield (which cannot be bettered from a security viewpoint). Trimble reacted negatively. Murphy was asked to raise the matter again with him but, we understand, has yet to do so. I will mention it to the Secretary of State but I think it is unlikely that the British Government will press the point very far. As you are aware, they have shown an obsessive concern with meeting the undertaking given by the Prime Minister to Trimble that the "offices at Maryfield will close by the end of the year".
11. We have, accordingly, been searching the residential market here for accommodation for our staff. We have looked at various properties controlled by the NIO or Government agencies. We have also conducted extensive searches of the private-sector market, either via selected estate agencies with whom we have established confidential contact or through the NIO property agency. Foremost in our minds have been security considerations, the desirability of a collective residential arrangement (or something very close), availability in the near future and affordability.
12. In a market which is considerably smaller than, say, that in Dublin, we have now come up with arrangements which meet our requirements and, in our judgement (and that of Mr McSwiney), are very unlikely to be bettered. They involve an apartment complex in the Upper Ormeau Road area which could accommodate eight of our staff and another in the city centre which would accommodate the remaining four.
13. The Ormeau Road complex, nearing completion, is a converted convent in a secluded location at the back of a Catholic church, in an area which has a preponderantly Catholic and middle-class population. Eight self-contained apartments in this small and quiet development, three of which are adjacent to each other, would be available to us on reasonable terms. The complex is already reasonably secure but we would discuss with the NIO and the RUC ways in which security might be reinforced.

2/4

14. The other complex, also nearing completion, is situated near Albert Bridge and the river Lagan. It is also a quiet development of new apartments which would assure a high degree of anonymity. The four apartments concerned would be available in December and on reasonable terms. Again, there is satisfactory security but discussions with the NIO and the RUC on this subject will be required. Both complexes are within easy driving distance of Windsor House and of each other. Our drivers would collect staff each morning and deliver them home in the evening.
15. We have indicated general interest in each of these complexes, following consultation with Mr McSwiney, and are seeking draft leases. Our hope is that, if all other arrangements are satisfactory, it would be possible to move into these apartments with effect from 1 January.
16. We will keep you posted on all developments.