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Victims fear Omagh stone will disappear

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Sunday, January 27, 2008

By Alan Murray

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Relatives of victims of the Omagh bombing fear a commemorative plinth — due to be removed from the town's memorial garden — may never be displayed in public again.

Omagh District Council has written to the Omagh Support and Self-Help Group asking families to remove any personal items or mementoes from the plinth by next weekend.

The memorial garden is being closed to enable the site to be developed.

But relatives' spokesman Michael Gallagher, whose son Aiden was killed in the atrocity, fears the stone may never be seen again because its inscription blames republicans for the mass-murder.

The council's chief executive, Daniel McSorley, said the stone will be removed, transported and stored at a "secure council facility".

In his letter, Mr McSorley said the nature and location "of any narrative for the Omagh memorial is currently being considered by the independent facilitation team who, I understand, are still engaging in meetings".

But Mr Gallagher said he believed the Sinn Fein-controlled council wants to banish the inscription on the existing stone because it blames republicans.

The removal of the stone was raised at an international conference attended by Mr Gallagher in Madrid last week. The issue was also highlighted in the Spanish Press.

Said Mr Gallagher: "We raised this with the council earlier in the month and we've now received an official letter saying the stone will be removed to a council facility rather than left with us to safely store.

"We expect this means that it will never be seen again once it is removed next weekend.

"We feel that the council and a small number of people in Omagh want to rewrite history because this atrocity embarrasses them, but we will continue to raise the issue around wording on a memorial both nationally and internationally."

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