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Maryfield

1. Maryfield is located in East Belfast on the Belfast/Hollywood road in an area between Knocknagoney and Hollywood, adjoining Palace Barracks and overlooking Belfast Lough. It is about 2 miles from the Stormont administration/parliament building complex by road (see photographs and maps). It is owned by McAlpine Bros and leased to the Department of Commerce. It incorporates a modern office building shaped like a "T" and a number of older buildings used by the RUC for vehicle storing and refitting. The RUC share part of the lease. The former Maryfield Lodge - a Victorian house - was demolished at an early stage by McAlpine.

2. The office and older buildings are set deep in grounds (reported to be about fifteen acres in all though this seemed to me a generous estimate). Access is from the by-pass through a gateway and private road of about 200 metres. The front side of the property immediately adjoining the by-pass is bordered with trees so that the buildings, at least at time of viewing, were not visible from the road.

3. The property is surrounded on all sides by modern fencing. If one takes a fixed point at the front entrance of the building there is: -

- (a) on the left hand side residential army, probably officer-class, red-bricked Victorian style housing close to the property;
- (b) towards the back left hand side, a small army area set aside for show-jumping and
- (c) a short distance behind the building are (i) an army rifle/practice range and (ii) a new army sports complex in process of construction.

All of these areas are separated from the property by a fence. However, the army residential quarters are particularly visible from the front of the office complex; the rifle range and sports complex are much less visible. More effective screening would reduce visibility but more importantly would emphasise separation. At the moment, the fencing dividing Maryfield and the army housing is very bare without any hedge lining and with only sparse tree cover.

5. Maryfield is bordered on the left hand side by a privately owned property; house (not visible) and extensive grounds. This property went up for sale about three months ago. It is understood that a private family has made an offer. It is not known whether the offer has been accepted or whether the sellers are open to other offers.

6. As mentioned, within the Maryfield grounds and separated from the office building by a small car park there are a number of older buildings which are used by the RUC for storing and refitting police vehicles - reported as unmarked RUC cars. However two police landrovers were also parked there at the time of viewing. This RUC facility is a highly visible and prominent feature of the section of the grounds adjoining the office. It was suggested that this area could be screened and a more private access point possibly opened up for the RUC. Screening could give a sense of separation but would not disguise or conceal the RUC facility. The RUC have responsibility for about $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ of the grounds in all.

7. Coming from West Belfast, Maryfield is reached by the Sydenham by-pass and the Belfast Road which runs to Holywood and Bangor. From Stormont, the main approach is by the Outer Ring (Parkway) which meets the Sydenham by-pass at the Knocknagoney roundabout. Driving time from West Belfast (early afternoon traffic) is about 10-15 minutes. Driving time from Stormont (mid-afternoon traffic) is about 7 minutes.

8. Driving from Knocknagoney roundabout towards the town of Holywood, there is on the left hand side running towards the Lough an undeveloped treeless and hedgeless substantial stretch of land, the property of the Belfast Harbour Authority. This could in theory (though it was thought unlikely in practice because of airport requirements) be zoned at some stage for industrial use. The right hand side of the Roadway is steeped and heavily tree-lined. There are two, not particularly visible, private entrances to private properties before one reaches the entrance for Maryfield which has its own access lane on the main road. The Maryfield gateway is clearly visible from the roadway and marked by a low white-painted(?) wall at the entrance point with a small sign indicating that it is a Department of Commerce property.

9. The Maryfield gateway is the last public entrance point on the right hand side of the road before the Palace Barracks. A little further along the road towards Holywood, the physical transition from Maryfield and preceeding properties to the military barracks area appears quite stark; the heavily wooded effect suddenly ends and one encounters at the barracks a more open vista of modern-style (junior ranks) army housing with little or no foliage. The main entrance to the barracks is about $\frac{4}{10}$ mile from the main entrance to Maryfield. Between these two entrance points, at the junction between the two properties, there are iron gates which are presumably military controlled but which are not at all prominent and which suggest a roadway which is little used.

10. The Palace Barracks area stretches from the Belfast road, which is the continuation of the Sydenham by-pass away from the Lough to the Old Holywood Road. There is a small residential private estate at the junction of Old Holywood Road and Knocknagoney Road. Overall, however, along the Old Holywood Road, between the barracks and Knocknagoney road, there is very little private housing. Indeed the Ministry of Defence would

appear to own a substantial parcel of land along this stretch of the Old Hollywood Road. An emergency access point to Old Hollywood Road though a new restricted road under construction within Palace Barracks could be made available.

11. Maryfield was used in the early seventies by the Northern Ireland I.D.B. who have moved to a city centre location. For the last two years it has been used mainly as an office of the factory inspectorate of the Department of Commerce. The office building now houses about 60 inspectors and staff but with a fair degree of overcrowding. The optimum staffing capacity is about 45.

12. If we were to accept Maryfield as a location for the Secretariat, I was told by Anthony Merryfield of the NIO, who showed me around, that we would have to decide whether we wished to share or move out the inspectorate completely. For early December a section of the office building could be set aside for the Secretariat, the British side taking the lower and the Irish taking the the upper floors of the short arm of the "T". It would be difficult to move all of the inspectorate out before Christmas and, assuming sharing is not envisaged, they would have to be moved in stages to an alternative accommodation.

13. I mentioned to Anthony Merryfield the question of live-in accommodation. It would seem that up to now the British had envisaged a combination of the following accommodation options:

- (i) a duty-officer suite in the office building;
- (ii) hotels at least as an initial option;
- (ii) the gate lodge at Stormont which could be redecorated;
- (iv) a house in the Helens Bay area which they own;
- (v) mobile homes in the grounds of Mayfield, perhaps as a short-term possibility.

I told Anthony Merryfield that I understood we would be looking for accommodation in the actual office building. I can say that he understood this point but it is also clear that we will still have to make our case and to look closely at the architectural possibilities. The current lease would apparently exclude live-in accommodation; but if the property is to be purchased, then I had the impression that MacAlpines could be open to persuasion.

14. Anthony Merryfield said that if the site was purchased, there would be the possibility in the longer term of constructing a purpose built office for the Secretariat.

14. Disadvantages:

- (i) The Maryfield site is (obviously) not in Stormont nor West Belfast.
- (ii) It adjoins and is surrounded on three of its five sides by an army barracks/army property. Army buildings can be seen from its front door. The IRA could try to make propaganda out of this location.
- (iii) There is an RUC facility prominent on the grounds; again, the IRA may seek to make capital out of this.
- (iv) Maryfield is in Protestant East Belfast.
- (v) Suitable live-in accommodation on site will require extensive restructuring of the office building.

15. Advantages:

- (i) The proximity of the army barracks and the RUC facility obviously promise tight security.

- (ii) Maryfield is not an army property. It should already be known at least to politicians and those interested in administration in Belfast as a civilian building. From the roadway it appears physically different from the adjoining barracks and separation within the grounds could be accentuated by screening.
- (iii) Access to the barracks can be provided for emergencies with a helicopter transport option in exceptional circumstances.
- (iv) The property is readily accessible to central Belfast and Stormont on major road networks; there are some other possibilities for varying the routes taken to and from Maryfield.
- (v) The present office building, if functional and unimaginative, is certainly very suitable as an office accommodation.
- (vi) The size of the building undoubtedly suggests spare capacity for live-in suites, subject to restructuring; to what degree of comfort is for expert opinion.
- (vii) There is the possibility for further on-site development.
- (ix) It has been open to the public in its present and former roles; it could certainly remain open to the public, within limits normal conditions along the main roadways prevailing.
- (x) If the adjoining private property were still for sale, it would offer possibilities for enlarging the Maryfield complex and enhancing its physical and aesthetic distinction.

MW

14/11/85.