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in Carson
4.6

1A-333/41



22/6

FROM: D McCALL
Security Policy & Operations Division
1 June 1998

See Copy Distribution List

Mr Carson
Mr [Signature]

1. Mr Clarke [Amended. I agree the Minister should approve the work. The police believe it is necessary because of general tensions in the area and it will help them police the controversial "Whiterock parade" in late June. Furthermore, the work has the agreement of politicians across a wide spectrum of opinion including Sinn Fein and the PUP. TC 2/6]
2. PS/Mr Ingram (B&L) (with map to Belfast office)

ADDITIONAL PHYSICAL SECURITY MEASURES - FLUSH BEND, SPRINGFIELD ROAD, BELFAST

Summary

Issue: Request from RUC for the installation of additional physical security measures to strengthen peaceline fence at Flush Bend, Springfield Road, Belfast.

Timescale: For immediate attention.

Recommendation: The Minister is asked to note the requirement for these additional measures, which have the agreement of the residents of the area and their community representatives.

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Discussion

Background

1. The RUC have submitted a request to strengthen the peaceline fencing at Flush Bend on the Springfield Road, in west Belfast which separates the Protestant Highfield and Springmartin estates from the Beechmount area of the Catholic Falls Road. This is an area which has a long history of conflict over a considerable period of time. Indeed, there are two other peacelines within a few hundred yards of Flush Bend, one separating the Protestant Shankill road and Nationalist Springfield Road and the other creating a barrier between the Protestant Springmartin Road and Nationalist New Barnsley area.

2. A request of this nature would not normally require Ministerial consideration, but in view of the 10 April Agreement and the implications of adding to peacelines at this time, it was considered appropriate to give the Minister an opportunity to examine the request. The attached map should aid identification of the areas in question.

Incidents

3. There has recently been an upsurge in attacks around Flush Bend. In particular there has been an increase in the number of stoning incidents across this peaceline and the local Protestant primary school and houses in the mainly Nationalist Watermouth Crescent have suffered considerable damage. In the most serious incident on 18 April, opposing factions created large gaps in the fence on either side of the main Springfield Road to confront each other. A number of vehicles on the main Springfield Road were subject to attack as were houses in Watermouth Crescent. Fortunately no-one was seriously hurt in the incident, but the police are very concerned that as the summer progresses, there will be further incidents in the area which could have potentially lethal consequences. In

particular, the controversial "Whiterock Orange Order parade is due to pass this route on 29 June and the police are firmly of the view that increased security at this location will considerably aid the policing of this parade.

4. The local Civil Representative has also reported that this fence has been breached on numerous occasions since the beginning of the year. Repairs have cost hundreds of pounds and he fully expects that he will have to carry out further regular repairs unless the fence is strengthened to deter such attacks.

Proposed Scheme

5. The existing peaceline amounts to little more than palisade fencing along both sides of the main Springfield Road. It is easily vandalised and can be breached with impunity. Police are concerned that it will prove inadequate in the coming weeks when they expect an increase in the number of sectarian attacks/disturbances in the area.

6. The RUC request is for the fencing on the Protestant side of the road to be increased in height by around a metre. In addition, they have requested that solid sheeting be placed over the palisade to provide cover from view so that the rival opposing factions cannot see each other thereby reducing the opportunity for and risk of confrontation. The cost of the work is expected to be around £8,500 and will take around two weeks to complete. The RUC are keen to make a start on the work as soon as possible so that it will be completed before the end of June.

Impact on the Community

7. These proposals will have little direct impact on the community as the fence in question is not directly in front of housing, nor does it block access to shops or other community facilities. Flush Bend however, is in the middle of the site of the proposed new University campus for Belfast. That campus, when it

comes on stream, will provide its own solution both physically and in terms of "mindset" to the problem of sectarianism in the area. Work, however, is not due to start on site until 1999/2000 at the earliest. The work envisaged by the scheme highlighted in paragraph 5 will allow the area to be made secure, in the short term, until construction on the campus begins. These measures will not hinder the building of the new university.

8. The Civil Representative has discussed these proposals with local councillors representing Sinn Fein (Tom Hartley), SDLP (Margaret Walsh) and PUP (Hugh Smyth). All are fully supportive of the new measures, as they had received complaints from their constituents during recent months with regard to attacks across the peaceline. They also agree with the view that the enhanced fence will reduce the incidents of sectarian disorder in the area.

Recommendation

9. The Minister is asked to approve this work. A draft defensive press ~~release~~ is attached should the matter receive publicity and require a response. Short Q & A material is also attached.

(Signed)

D McCALL
SHA EXT 27022

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DRAFT PRESS RELEASE

“Regret the need at this time to undertake minor work to improve and enhance the peaceline at Flush Bend on the Springfield Road, Belfast. There has however been a significant number of sectarian incidents of late at this location and the RUC consider that the current fencing is inadequate both to protect people living close to this interface and property.

Officials have consulted with local representatives across the political spectrum about these measures and all have agreed that in the circumstances, the work is necessary.”

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QUESTION & ANSWER MATERIAL

Q. Is this work really necessary?

A. Yes. Incidents of sectarian violence at this interface have recently and significantly increased. The present fencing is inadequate to prevent both stone throwing attacks across the peaceline and rival groups breaking through it to confront each other. The new fencing will provide better protection to the residents who live in the immediate area.

Q. Why now?

A. The RUC believe this location will continue to attract sectarian incidents and they are concerned that if additional preventative measures are not taken that some individual will be seriously injured or worse. Moreover the Springfield Road Primary School and housing in nearby locations have increasingly come under severe attacks. Steps had therefore to be taken to give better protection to everyone. These new measures are designed to do just that.

Q. Who requested the new measures?

A. The RUC.

Q. Do they have the support of both communities?

A. Yes. Local councillors representing all sides of the political spectrum were consulted and are fully supportive of the new measures which they hope will bring stability to the area particularly with the establishment of the new University Campus shortly.

Q. Will these additional security measures not portray the wrong image for those developing the University campus?

A. I don't think so. These new measures will help create a better atmosphere and bring stability to the area in the period leading to the establishment of the new Campus.

Q Does the fact that peacelines still need to be built and/or strengthened mean that the 10 April Agreement has failed.

A. Absolutely not. The Agreement offers us the best opportunity to create the conditions where we can begin to dismantle the physical barriers separating the two communities. We have not however reached that stage yet and it will take time. In the meantime we must continue to take action to prevent sectarian attacks, especially where the measures proposed have support across both communities.