

PLANS: The huge Tribeca development to rebuild a derelict swathe of Belfast city centre has been approved by the council



Not imposing good design on city plan unforgivable

BELFAST City Council has approved the huge 'Tribeca' development to rebuild a derelict swathe of the city. The fact that land-banking for redevelopment causes dereliction is an argument long lost in this instance.

Opinion remains divided on whether the \$500 million project should be welcomed despite its shortcomings at a time when investment in city centres is desperately needed. DUP, Sinn Féin and PUP councillors voted for it, with all others opposed. The business sector is supportive while arts and architecture groups say public space will be ruined by bland, overbearing buildings.

Many of these concerns can still be addressed. Only outline planning permission has been granted, relating to overall shape. A separate application must be made for all other details, including external appearance, access and landscaping. Developers could be required to reconstruct Belfast's Victorian and Edwardian heritage, or at least to pay it some heed.

Councillors have a case that they had to accept Tribeca but passing up their chance to impose good design on it would be unforgivable.

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REOPENING of schools in Northern Ireland is going well but it is being accompanied by an environmental disaster, with many children told to bring in single-use water bottles to be disposed of by their school every day.

If this applies to just half of all pupils here it means throwing out 875,000 bottles a week.

Is this proportionate to managing coronavirus? Guidelines from Stormont's Department of Education are of little help, other than to cover official backslides. The guidelines say nothing about bottles or provision of drinking water. They do say "disposable packaging may be required" if packed lunches have to be eaten in classrooms. This appears to be where the bottle requirement is coming from.

But what does 'may be required' mean? Is it like 'might be compulsory'?

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DUP education minister Peter Weir has been criticised by Sinn Féin for putting transfer tests back to January, instead of

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taking the opportunity to scrap them.

Because Weir supports academic selection it tends to be overlooked that he cannot simply abolish it. His department tried that in 2008 under a Sinn Féin minister, only to see two unregulated tests emerge. The private providers of those tests intended to proceed this year, so Weir has only been able to negotiate with them to rearrange dates.

The unauthorised nature of testing means predicted grades could not have been used, while grammar schools would have refused any other entrance system.

Selection might have to go but it cannot be wished away overnight.

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CHANCELLOR Rishi Sunak is reportedly considering raising corporation tax from 19 to 24 per cent, around the European average but double the rate in the Republic.

These reports may have more to do with cabinet intrigue than imminent policy but they will still resurrect debate on devolving corporation tax to Stormont.

There is a distinct sense this will be unwelcome all round. The executive has been able to ask for the power since 2015 but lost interest in it as the UK rate was cut. The subject was not mentioned in January's deal to restore devolution and there was no controversy that same month when Sinn Féin

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finance minister Conor Murphy announced the executive is no longer pursuing it. Even before coronavirus, everyone felt they had enough on their plate.

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ONE thing that did get a mention in January's deal was UK funding to establish 'the Castlereagh Foundation', to support academic research into "shifting patterns of identity in Northern Ireland".

This was part of a unionist-leaning culture and heritage section in the deal, clearly cobbled together in an attempt to 'balance' an Irish language act.

Campaign group Yes For Unity is now threatening to take the executive, the Home Office and the secretary of state to court on the grounds the Castlereagh Foundation could influence the outcome of a border poll.

The DUP will be delighted that any nationalists believe this, as it has had absolutely no luck persuading unionists of it.

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SINN Féin is pulling out all the stops to blame the SDLP for flooding in Newcastle.

The waters had barely receded before Chris Hazzard, the area's Sinn Féin MP, was giving interviews and fronting a social media campaign saying SDLP infrastructure minister Nicola Mallon knew for days a storm was coming and her department should have prepared by cleaning out drains and gullies.

Flood defence is a bit more complicated than that, of course, as Hazzard ought to know, having been Stormont's last infrastructure minister before his party walked off the job for three years from 2017.

This cannot have helped with a \$5 million flood defence scheme for the affected area, due to start in 2018 but put back by the department in Hazzard's absence until next year.

Mallon has now brought it forward.

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THE reputation of civil servants as clock watchers has perhaps not been helped by Northern Ireland civil service chief David Sterling, who announced his retirement this week by tweeting: "Today I leave the NICS after 42 years, 199 days."

ON THIS DAY

SEPTEMBER 5 1970

'Fantastic Risk' from RUC Shots

'I MIGHT as well tell you, Constable, that what troubles me considerably is that two police officers fired into a populated block of flats in an attempt, presumably, to quell some activity on the roof of [Divis] Flats, thus putting the lives of the people in the flats at a fantastic risk.'

This was stated yesterday morning by Lord Justice Scarman after RUC Constable, Frederick Mahood, who had been stationed at Hastings Street police station on observation duty with two marksmen on the night of August 14, 1969, told the Court that his two companions had fired 18 rounds into the Divis Flats complex. They had been armed with two high-velocity rifles. Constable Mahood, when asked by Scarman if he thought that Hastings Street station had been under fire that night, said he had not. The constable said that his two companions had fired after they had seen the muzzle flashes of an automatic weapon coming from the top of the maisonettes within the Flats area. Mr Garrett McGrath, QC, for the Falls residents, while cross-examining the witness, referred to a forensic science report which stated that the damage caused to Divis Flats had been caused by three weapons – an SLR (self-loading rifle), a .303 rifle and a Browning machine-gun. 'You know that Trooper Anthony McCabe was shot with an SLR bullet that night. The time of his death has not been established, but would you agree that it was one of the bullets fired from the roof of Hastings Street police station?' asked Mr McGrath. The witness replied: 'That is possible.'

Man Killed in Belfast Blast

A MAN was blown to pieces and another is in hospital after an explosion at an electricity transformer in New Forge Lane, Malone Road, Belfast last night and early today a big Army-RUC search was going on in the wooded area beside the transformer in case there were any other people dead or injured. One line of inquiry is that the explosion was premature and that the bomb had gone off before those who had planted it made their escape. (As Lord Scarman vigorously probed the RUC's use of heavy machine guns against Divis Flats in August 1969, *The Irish News* reported the stepping-up of the IRA's bombing campaign. Michael Kane from west Belfast died while planting a bomb and was given an IRA funeral.)

JFK Widow to Visit Shipyard

FINAL preparations were being made last night for today's whistle-stop visit to Belfast by Greek shipping magnate Aristotile Onassis and his wife, Jackie [widow of President John F Kennedy] to the Harland and Wolff shipyard.

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