

GLENARM VILLAGE COMMITTEE

SUBMISSION

A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Glenarm Village Committee is a local voluntary/community group that promotes community sustainability and economic regeneration in Glenarm, a village on the Antrim coast, southernmost of the Nine Glens of Antrim, within the Larne Borough Council area.
- 1.2 To maximise the opportunities of the 21st century, Glenarm is now trying to achieve economic regeneration through tourism. The village has been designated a Conservation Area and has good tourist potential. It has an historic limestone waterfront, a small marina, Glenarm Castle and Walled Garden. The Glenarm area has also been designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and an Environmentally Sensitive Area.
- 1.3 However, The Village Committee is concerned that in recent years, the local community is being pushed out of the housing market, due to the increase in property speculators buying up properties in the village for second homes. As the 'full time' resident local community declines, due to the cost of housing rising beyond their reach, younger people who grew up in the village are forced to look for housing elsewhere to bring up their families. Already one village primary school has closed and local shops are struggling to sustain an adequate income.

2.0 A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

- 2.1 Glenarm Village Committee welcomes a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. We are convinced of the need for greater acknowledgment and legislative protection of rights in Northern Ireland.

2.2 In March 2007 we established a Bill of Rights Working Group to explore and develop our response to the Bill of Rights. The group has participated in the CFNI Bill of Rights Mentoring and Support Programme and this has involved learning about human rights, housing rights and affordable housing. The group organised a seminar entitled 'The right to affordable housing and its role in sustainable regeneration of coastal villages' to raise awareness of the issues affecting residents in Glenarm and to highlight rights and demand for affordable housing.

3.0 THE RIGHT TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

3.1 We believe the Bill of Rights should establish and protect the right to affordable housing. We believe existing rights, housing and planning legislation does not provide this protection.

3.2 We agree with Sir John Semple's definition in the 'Review of Affordable Housing' (Spring 2007) that 'affordable housing costs should not exceed 35% of gross household income'.

3.3 The particular circumstances in Northern Ireland, after decades of instability, economic decline and low levels of tourism, have created a sudden and sharp increase in housing prices. This has resulted in an uncontrolled level of property speculation and development in coastal villages, which threatens to destroy them as all year round sustainable local communities.

3.4 We believe that 20% of all new housing developments should be affordable housing, as an allocation of this kind is standard practice in Scotland, England and the Republic of Ireland.

3.5 We believe affordable housing should be located within easy reach of employment opportunities, childcare facilities, schools and other services

3.6 We believe the Bill of Rights should place duties on local and central government to protect the right to affordable housing.

3.7 We believe the Bill of Rights should place obligations on Local Councils and other public authorities to make surplus land and resources available for affordable housing.

3.8 We believe the Bill of Rights should protect the right of residents of a local community to stay within their community to live, work and bring up their families.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Glenarm Village Committee urges the Bill of Rights Forum to enshrine the right to affordable housing in the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.
- 4.2 Glenarm Village Committee would welcome an opportunity to meet with the Bill of Rights Forum to provide further information and answer any questions in relation to this submission.