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Hunger Strike memorial to get council equality assessment

By Claire Simpson

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THE future of a Co Tyrone Hunger Strike memorial is still unclear despite input from a council, the Equality

Commission, the Planning Service and the secretary of state.

Omagh District Council was censured by the Equality Commission in March 2007 for letting the memorial in Dromore remain on council-owned property without investigating whether or not the monument contravened equality laws.

The council has agreed to carry out an equality assessment after the commission asked Secretary of State Shaun Woodward two months ago to intervene.

The memorial in the grounds of Old Dromore Church includes a three-foot tall monument to IRA hunger striker and former Fermanagh and South Tyrone MP Bobby Sands, an Irish tricolour and a tree commemorating the 10 men who died during the Hunger Strike of 1981.

It is understood that the commemorative stone was erected by Dromore Memorial Committee more than seven years ago although the council said it only became aware of it in 2001 after DUP councillor Thomas Buchanan requested its removal.

A spokeswoman for the council said it had prepared a draft policy on how to deal with memorials.

The draft will be subject to an eight-week public consultation before the final policy is drawn up.

“Since receiving the report from the Equality Commission the council has continued to work to achieve a satisfactory resolution of the issue of the memorial at Dromore,” she said.

“This work is ongoing in parallel with the equality impact assessment process.”

However, the memorial may have to be demolished after the Planning Service confirmed it did not have planning permission.

A spokeswoman for the Planning Service said it was “investigating the matter and, if necessary, will take appropriate enforcement action”.

Jim Allister MEP, leader of Traditional Unionist Voice, said he had written to environment minister Sammy Wilson, asking his department to remove the monument.

“As planning minister, Sammy Wilson has a duty to ensure instances of unlawful development are fully investigated, with appropriate enforcement action taken where appropriate,” he said.

“While I understand an enforcement case against this monument has now been opened by Planning Service, I am appalled that it has taken until my recent intervention for this to be so. Furthermore I have also raised this matter with the chief local government auditor.”


Sinn Fein councillor Sean Begley said he felt that many Dromore residents would oppose the removal of the memorial.

“Dromore has a very big nationalist and republican area,” he said.

“Bobby Sands was an MP for the area and a lot of people would be very supportive of the memorial.”

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