

The Historical Weir Home for Nurses at Cork Street, Dublin, and The Quaker Burial Ground

“Built in 1903 to provide accommodation for nurses working in the Cork Street Fever Hospital. Scottish born James Weir was a grocer, wine and whiskey merchant. His will he left legacies for hospital works. The nurses home continued until the 1970s when the building transferred to psychiatric services.” [Cork Street | News | The Liberties Dublin](#)

The historical Weir Home for Nurses at Cork St. D8

- [Royal College of Physicians of Ireland](#)
 - You can contact them at heritagecentre@rcpi.ie
- [The James Weir Home for Nurses, 103-4 Cork Street, Dublin 8, DUBLIN - Buildings of Ireland](#)
- [Cork Street | News | The Liberties Dublin](#) (2023)
- [Burial Grounds – Tuesday, 27 Sep 2022 – Parliamentary Questions \(33rd Dáil\) – Houses of the Oireachtas](#) (2022)
- [Cork Street Fever Hospital | News | The Liberties Dublin](#) (2020)-
 - links to: [Loggia, The James Weir Home for Nurses, Cork Street, Dublin 8 | Built Dublin](#)
- [McVerry Trust to redevelop building in Quaker cemetery to house homeless – The Irish Times](#) (2019)
- [‘Where the Heart Is’, Irish Times](#) (1996)

The Quaker Burial Ground

- *Part of Quaker burial grounds might be used to aid construction of social housing next door, council says* - Dublin Inquirer (2024), Article Below.
- *Council Aims to Take Over Historic Quaker Burial Site – but Its Plans for the Land off Cork Street Are Unclear* - Dublin Inquirer (2022), Article Below
- *A Burial Ground on Cork Street Hints at a Neglected History* - Dublin Inquirer (2019) Article Below
- [Cork Street’s Quaker Burial Ground | News | The Liberties Dublin](#) (2019)
- [Dublin Burial Grounds of the Society of Friends | News | The Liberties Dublin](#) (2019)

Part of Quaker burial grounds might be used to aid construction of social housing next door, council says

The burial ground on Cork Street near Marrowbone Lane dates back to the 17th century and hundreds of people are buried under its grassy surface.

Sam Trantum
12 June 2024



The Quaker burial ground on Cork Street. Credit: Sam Trantum

For years, there's been a plan to turn the old James Weir Home for Nurses building on Cork Street into social housing, and fix up and better preserve the adjoining Quaker burial ground.

When Labour Councillor Darragh Moriarty asked for an update on that tangled and long-delayed multi-agency effort, the council issued [a written reply](#) in March of this year.

It said, among other things, that, "Temporary use of a portion of the Burial Grounds is likely needed for construction to proceed subject to acquisition/agreement/license to build."

The burial ground looks like a grassy green lawn, but underneath [hundreds – or even thousands](#) – of people are buried. This part of the city was the heart of the Quaker community in the 17th century, [according to](#) Rob Goodbody, a Quaker historian.

There are not many more than a dozen visible headstones, most lying horizontal on the grass, with dates in the mid-19th century. Up till then, the Quaker community didn't allow its members to put markers on their graves, Goodbody said.

Asked about the council's statement, Susanna Murdoch, a member of Dublin Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland, said that "Any activity at the Burial Ground will have to be managed respectfully recognising its special status and those interred there."

Plans, long-delayed

The HSE manages the red-brick Weir Home building, on Cork Street between Marrowbone Lane and Urban Plant Life.

Dating back to 1900, [it was once](#) a place to live for nurses working in Cork Street Fever Hospital across the road, the complex now known as Brú Chaoimhín, which is still used by the HSE.

In October 2022, [the plan](#) was for the HSE to transfer the building and adjoining burial ground to the Peter McVerry Trust.

The Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers) hold title to the burial ground, but it is under the control of the HSE at the moment, [the council says](#).

Peter McVerry trust would then redevelop the Weir House as social housing and transfer the burial ground to Dublin City Council, [the plan went](#).

Earlier this year, Moriarty, the Labour councillor, asked council managers for "an update on plans for the Quaker Burial Ground on Cork Street to transfer to Dublin City Council for a publicly accessible greenspace".



The old James Weir Home for Nurses building on Cork Street. Credit: Sam Trantum

Peter McVerry Trust – which is being investigated by regulators over a financial scandal that [is still unfolding](#) – had withdrawn from the Weir Home project, [the response said](#). The search was on for another housing charity to take over, it said.

“The Parks Service will take the burial grounds in charge if and when the title is transferred to Dublin City Council,” said the response.

Murdoch, of the Quakers, said the burial grounds were “A unique oasis which we hope will become a green community facility supporting biodiversity.”

Used for construction?

So what did the statement in the council’s response to Moriarty about part of the burial ground being needed for construction of the social housing at Weir House mean?

“Temporary use of a portion of the Burial Grounds is likely needed for construction to proceed,” the response had said.

Would part of the burial ground be used to store construction materials? To park construction vehicles? To drive through to access Weir House?

“We’re not aware of any plans to use the Quaker Burial Grounds for construction,” a council spokesperson said by email on 9 May.

“Any use of this site will need to be discussed and agreed with the City Archaeologist/ National Monument Service and meet the objectives of Dublin City Council [Burial Places Strategy](#),” she said.

Why did the council’s Culture, Recreation and Economic Services department tell Moriarty that use of part of the grounds was likely needed for construction to proceed, and the press office was providing a response that seemed to contradict that?

“We haven’t seen proposals for the development of Weir House which interfaces with the Quaker Burial so we can’t comment on it,” the spokesperson said.

“There is an existing entrance to Weir House from the street via a tarmac driveway which we understand traverses the Quaker Burial Ground so use of this land for development of Weir House would be subject to agreement with conditions for protection of the Burial Grounds during the works,” they said.

Tony O’Riordan, CEO of Sophia Housing, said that his housing charity “would be interested in acquiring James Weir Home but there are no formal negotiations at this stage”.

But Sophia Housing “has also a track record of working with heritage buildings and would be acutely aware of the historical significance of the buildings and burial grounds”.

“The role that front line care workers have played in Ireland is also remarkable and Sophia is aware that the building was used by Nurses/Front Line workers and that contribution needs to be remembered,” he said.

Council Aims to Take Over Historic Quaker Burial Site – but Its Plans for the Land off Cork Street Are Unclear

Claudia Dalby
26 October 2022



The Quaker burial ground on Cork Street. Photo by Claudia Dalby.

Dublin City Council plans sometime in the future to acquire the old [Quaker burial site](#) on Cork Street from a housing charity, said a council official in an area meeting on Wednesday.

The number of people buried in the quiet empty green space near the austere and red-brick [James Weir Home for Nurses](#) is unknown, but [estimates ranged from the hundreds to the thousands](#).

Kieran Rose, a retired council planner and local resident, [has been pushing for](#) the state to take custody of the burial grounds and building, to preserve it. “It’s one of the most important historical sites in the city. It has about 4,500 burials of Quakers in it.”

The Quaker burial grounds [have been neglected](#), he says, and should be restored and kept up by the National Monument Service.

At the moment, the idea is that the old Weir Home would be turned into social housing by the Peter McVerry Trust, a housing and homelessness charity.

While one councillor says the area needs more affordable housing, another said at last Wednesday's meeting of the South Central Area Committee said she would like to see it come back to life as a community space given the scarcity of those in the neighbourhood.

What's the Plan?

The Weir Home is hugely important to Irish medical history and Irish social history, says Rose. "In dealing with epidemics over the 19th century and up to 1950."

Meanwhile the Quaker site is relatively unknown to locals and neglected, he says. "Largely because of the Quaker tradition of not having headstones."

Up until 1855, the Quaker community didn't allow its members to put any kind of markers on their graves, Quaker historian Rob Goodbody has said. "The general feeling was that it was the community that mattered, not the individual."

The Weir Home and the burial grounds are currently owned by the Health Service Executive (HSE), said Bruce Phillips, the council's South Central Area manager, at the meeting last Wednesday.

But Peter McVerry Trust is in talks with the HSE, the council, the Housing Agency and the Department of Housing about acquiring the entire site, the building and the burial plot.

It plans to put 19 apartments in the Weir Home, said Francis Doherty, the charity's spokesperson, on Friday.

A spokesperson for the HSE said that the HSE Mental Health Services vacated the building in late 2021.

At the meeting, Phillips suggested that there had been a preliminary agreement struck. "The Peter McVerry Trust have agreed to pass on the cemetery at a nominal value to the city council," he said.

But Doherty said Peter McVerry Trust hasn't confirmed what portion of the site, if any, it would transfer to the council. "No final details have been worked out as regards the purchase, transfer and any future division of the site."

Councillors asked why the council cannot directly acquire the burial grounds from the HSE.

This chain of the HSE selling it all to Peter McVerry Trust, which would sell just the grounds to the council, is just the clearest way to do the transaction, said Phillips, at the meeting.

Peter McVerry Trust would not ask for payment from the council for the transfer of the cemetery, said Doherty on Tuesday. “We cannot sell or profit from State funded housing projects nor would we seek to.”

The Grounds

At the meeting, councillors also asked what the council is planning to do with the grounds.

Rose, the planner and local resident, says that part of the burial ground is now used as a surface car park and the rest hasn’t been preserved as a historical site.

“It’s an incredibly awful way to treat a very historic burial ground,” he said.

The western wall of the burial grounds underwent preservation works in 2021, after a programme of preservation works was prepared, said a spokesperson for the HSE on Tuesday.

Dublin City Council should use the grounds as a heritage or exhibition space, says Rose. “That would explain the Quaker burial ground and Quaker history in the Liberties.”

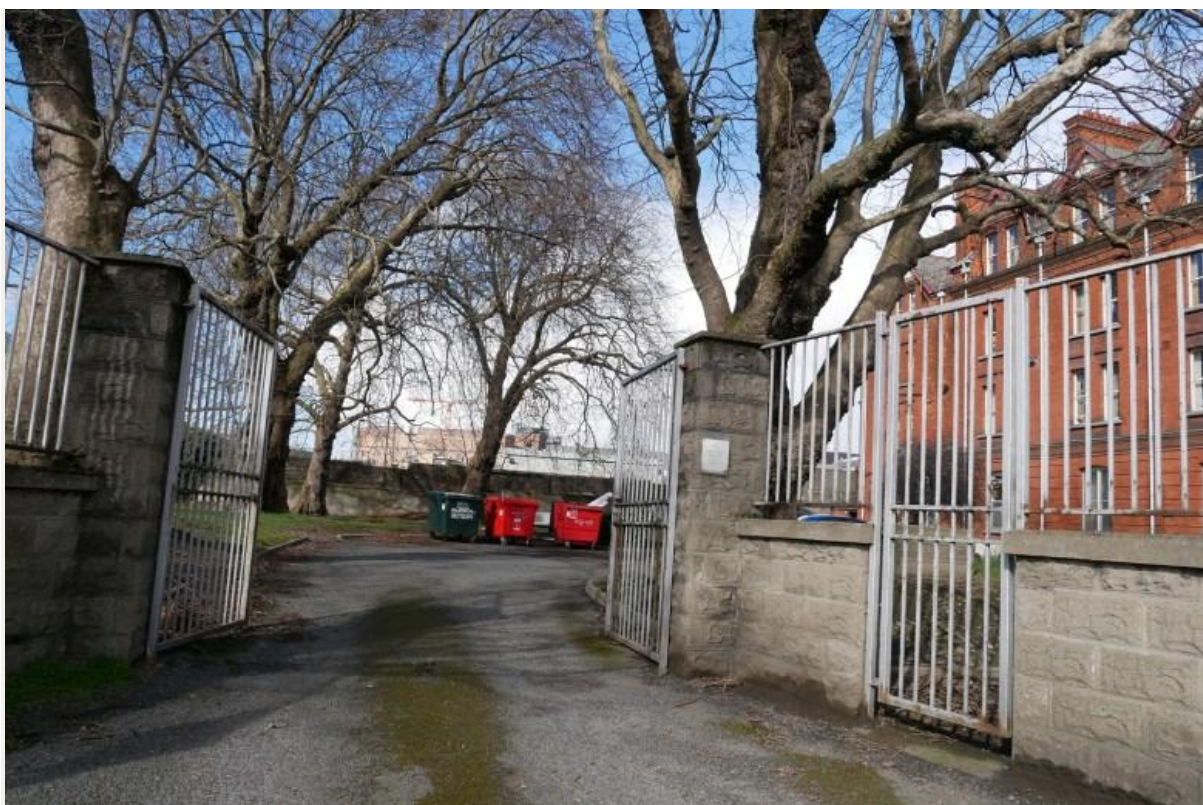
Darragh Moriarty, a Labour Party councillor, said he would like to see the grounds used as a walkway through to the future development on the Marrowbone Lane Depot Site.

“I think that would be really good linkage to have,” he says. “There’s no permeability going straight through to get towards Marrowbone Lane, Pimlico and so on. The more ways we can open that up, the better”

A walkway would need to be sensitively done, he says. “It is a graveyard, it is a resting place.”

There should also be a plaque or history information boards to mark the Quaker burial site, he says.

Quaker House Dublin said they could not respond to queries in time for deadline.



Michael Pidgeon, a Green Party councillor, said the burial ground looks roughly the same size as Weaver Park, and it's next to the council's Marrowbone Lane Depot site, which the council has had [plans to redevelop](#) for homes and sports pitches.

"That's really positive, if that's something the council can come into ownership of, I think that's huge for me," he said. "It's a big space."

Máire Devine, a Sinn Féin councillor, said of the burial ground: "We could make so much of it in this unique spot along Cork Street just on the tourist trail."

But it was a problem that Quakers in Dublin hadn't been involved in discussions around the land transfer, she said.

"There's no involvement of Dublin Friends of the Quakers, in informing them or liaising with them," said Devine.

She asked for a meeting with Peter McVerry Trust, the HSE, Quakers, the Housing Agency, the council and the Department of Housing so there can be clarity on what is happening with the grounds and the building.

“It’s just such a precious part of Dublin 8 and we need to make sure it’s managed and run and protected and valued,” she said.

Phillips said a meeting wouldn’t be appropriate as there is an ongoing legal process ongoing around the acquisition. “And I wouldn’t want to jeopardise that in any way.”

After the transfer of the property, then a meeting could be held, he said.

“We all acknowledge that it’s a precious building, and it’s a fantastic resource to have in the area, and that we will do everything in our powers to make sure that everybody is consulted and that your request is fulfilled,” said Phillips.

In The Future

Phillips, the South Central Area manager, said the council had assessed the old Weir Home building that sits beside the burial ground.

“And we felt that it would be better that Peter McVerry Trust would acquire the building directly from the HSE, for their uses, rather than the city council,” he said.

Still, Devine, the councillor, and Rose, the local planner, said they would like the building brought back as some kind of community space.

Rose said that the building would deliver very few apartments, and that there are other new housing developments on Cork Street.

Moriarity, the Labour Party councillor, says long-term, affordable or public homes would be a good use for the space.

“There’s a lot of private accommodation, particularly [built to rent] down there, lots of student accommodation, so I think bringing a bit of a mix, in terms of a social mix, affordable or just public housing mix, to that street would be good,” he says.

The Weir Home building, which dates from 1900, was once a place to live for nurses working in Cork Street Fever Hospital across the road, the complex now known as Brú Chaoimhín, [which is still used](#) by the HSE.

It could have a cultural use, or become a museum, said Rose. “We’ve a huge shortage of community spaces in the Liberties currently, and I think that that would be a more cost-effective way to retain the building.”

That would require less renovation than turning it into homes, he said. “To be of any quality, in terms of size, I don’t think it will be cost effective. I think the conversion with proper fire safety, with proper disability access,” says Rose. “It will be probably quite difficult to convert it to apartments basically.”

Later on the phone, Devine said she had asked during other council meetings whether the building could be used as a nurses’ or medical museum, community space, and accommodation.

“It’s got such a depth of history that I think we need to respect that,” she says.

There are so many hospitals nearby that it would make sense as a museum to mark the area as a medical quarter, she says. “Open it up, and be imaginative about it, and attract schools, children, education, tourists, visitors to it.”

Doherty, the Peter McVerry Trust spokesperson, said it’s hard to determine whether the building is appropriate for something other than housing.

“No one has sought to carry out an appraisal for same, and no entity has put forward a formal proposal and costing for an alternative use,” she said.

A masterplan for community spaces in Dublin 8 is needed, he said. “We are aware of the lack of community, social and civic amenity spaces in Dublin 8. This is something that is raised repeatedly with councillors for the area.”

“It is also important to note that the decanting of this property has been flagged for many years and that time would have given other entities time to engage with the HSE and prepare and propose alternative uses,” he said.

A Burial Ground on Cork Street Hints at a Neglected History

Lois Kapila and Zoe Obeimhen

13 March 2019



Photo by Lois Kapila

On a fresh bright morning, the clock struck 10am on the recently restored clock in the tower at the Brú Chaoimhín on Cork Street.

There was a distant hum of pneumatic drills from a nearby building site on Cork Street, near the bottom of Marrowbone Lane.

Dusty builders in orange and yellow hi-vis jackets emerged from behind scaffolding on a morning break. Few of them seem to notice the quiet and empty green space beside the red-brick James Weir Home for Nurses.

Retired planner and local resident Kieran Rose wants that to change. This green space is the historic Quaker burial ground, a final resting place for the Dublin's Quaker community in centuries past.

Rose says it has been overlooked, and that it has potential to add to the rediscovery of the history of the wider Liberties area.

Sinn Féin Councillor Críona Ní Dhálaigh has been pushing for that, too.

“For me, it is about actually preserving it and showing it some tender loving care,” she says. “In my opinion, no graveyard should ever be neglected. It’s a place of rest.”

Quakers in Dublin

At the graveyard gates, the twitter of birds is audible.

There are piles of brown, windswept leaves along the edges of the boundary wall, with some rubbish: disposable coffee cups, white plastic lids, and empty milk cartons.

On a carpet of grass, a single gravestone sticks up into the air. Several others lie flat.

Back in the 17th century, the Liberties and the south-western part of the city were industrial areas, says Rob Goodbody, a Quaker historian.

“Very important for merchants, artisans, and whatever, weavers that sort of thing, in the 17th century,” he says. “That was the heart of the Quaker community in Dublin at the time.”

There was once a Quaker burial ground on Stephen’s Green, but it was small and filled up. So they bought land on Cork Street in the 1690s, he says.

Quakers were somewhat separate at that time from the many of the major religious communities within the city, he says.

They weren’t among the Catholic majority, but didn’t fit in with mainstream Protestants either, he says. “They [wouldn’t take oaths](#) for one thing.”

Back then, men had to take oaths to enter university, take office and – for a while – even enter trade guilds, he says.

In time, Quakers broke this last barrier because they were so prominent among merchants and traders in the city, he says. “The system began to allow them to get in without making an oath.”



Photo by Lois Kapila

Quakers played major roles in the social life of the Liberties and Dublin as a whole, he says. “One of the things that Quakers would be known for was their philanthropic works, their works with the poor.”

They were involved in setting up the Cork Street Fever Hospital, which is over the road from the Cork Street graveyard at Brú Chaoimhín.

They also set up a school for the poor people of the Liberties – the largest school in Dublin in its day, which was near where the Guinness brewery is now, he says.

Over time, the Quaker population in the Liberties fell. From the 19th century, many moved out to around Churchtown, Rathfarnham and Monkstown, says Goodbody.

“As their businesses were taking off, they were becoming more ... prosperous,” he says. So they fled the gritty air and poor water and sanitation for cleaner, greener areas.

Rose, the retired planner, points to the famous Bewley family, who owned the coffee houses on Grafton Street, Westmoreland Street and Aungier Street.

Eventually the family gave the business to their employees, to run as a workers' cooperative, he said.

Other notable members of the community included Joseph Fade, who was a successful banker – and had Fade Street named after him.

His house has just been restored on Thomas Street, where Frawley's shop used to be, says Rose.

Rose also highlights how many Quakers emigrated to the United States in the 17th and 18th century and set up Quaker towns.

Respecting History

It's unclear how many people are buried beneath the grass in the plot at Cork Street.

"It would be hundreds," says Goodbody. He's tried to look at the records, but they don't always have enough information to tally.

The graveyard has 17 visible headstones with dates written on them from between 1848 and 1860. The majority are horizontal on the carpet of green grass.

One headstone still stands upright. It's light grey, about half a metre high, and is engraved with the names of two siblings, Sophia and Frederick Webb, who died at the ages of 3 and 7, and were the children of William and Mary Webb.

Beneath a huge beech tree is a family plot for three members of the Edmundson family. The three headstones are engraved with dates: 1849, 1848 and 1859.

Only one headstone is upright for a reason. Up until 1855, the Quaker community didn't allow its members to put any kind of markers on their graves, says Goodbody.

"The general feeling was that it was the community that mattered, not the individual," he said.

Quakers didn't put up monuments to anybody. Even portraits were frowned upon – at least until the middle of the 19th century.

When, at that time, the rules eased up, a few people with family buried in Cork Street put up grave markers over the stones.



Photo by Lois Kapila

Some of the dates on the gravestones are before 1855, but the stones weren't put there until afterwards, he says. "That's one of the reasons it's such a low-key place."

Because the idea of having grave markers was such a brand-new thing, the format hadn't been decided.

"Lying them flat was the original idea," Goodbody says. "Very quickly, they started to put them upright and it was only one in there."

Rose says that there needs to be a survey of the burial ground, and steps should be taken to preserve and take custody of the site. "The Quaker history is very much undocumented and not really understood," he says.

What Kind of Space?

At the end of the 19th century, the Quakers sold the burial ground to the Cork Street Fever Hospital because they wanted to build a nurses' home.

That was built at one end, and the rest is the gardens – and now it’s a home for the elderly, says Goodbody.

Ní Dhálaigh, the Sinn Féin councillor, says there seemed to be a cool reception to the idea of preserving the graveyard at first from the Department for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

That’s changed, though, and the department has agreed to work on the idea, and asked the Minister for Health to ask the HSE – who lease the burial ground – to take a look at what can be done.

The National Monument Service has visited the site to offer advice as part of that, said Ní Dhálaigh.

Rose says it’s a chance to “take advantage of our rich historical assets” in the Liberties, building on the successful restoration work that has been carried out at St James’ Church, which is now the Pearse Lyons distillery.

The dilapidated burial site could be integrated into the development plan for the 4.6 hectare Marrowbone Lane site nearby, he says. The council [has plans to redevelop](#) its large depot there.

“We have a duty of care for this [burial] site for posterity,” says Rose. It could start with simple measures like restoring the wall, as was done at St Catherine’s Lane, off Thomas Street.

Goodbody says he thinks there should be as little done with the space as possible, beyond tidying it up and preserving its history.

That would be in keeping with the ethos of Quaker burial grounds. “There was never, back at that time, much of a tradition of visiting graves and things like that,” says Goodbody.

Graveyards were well-kept, the grass trimmed, but that was about it. “You respected the dead by leaving the ground unbuilt on and well-tended,” he says.

Ní Dhálaigh said she noticed the burial ground when she was asking for the jagged barbed wire to be taken off a nearby site, and then noticed the lovely green space.

“I kind of felt a bit guilty that I didn’t know about it,” she said. It’s a side of the Liberties people don’t hear about that much – its long history of religious minorities and immigration.

She said there are good examples of graveyards being preserved and adding to the visible history of a neighbourhood: St Luke's Church [down the road](#), or the St Catherine's graveyard, she said.

You have to make sure they're safe spaces, she says. But "you can be a graveyard and a public space".

"The first thing they need to do is actually to address the shameful neglect," she says.

WHERE THE HEART IS

24 September 1996

The Eastern Health Board can be justly proud of the way in which it has implemented its policy of transferring long term psychiatric patients to the community

The Eastern Health Board can be justly proud of the way in which it has implemented its policy of transferring long term psychiatric patients to the community. It has done so without the horror stories we hear from other countries. But what it is proposing to do at the Weir Home in Cork Street in Dublin is a blot on a fine record. Psychiatric patients have been living in the Weir Home, a high support hostel, for 15 years. In that time, according to people living in the hostel, residents of Cork Street and psychiatric nurses, - they have made the community their home. They are accepted by their neighbours, many of whom they know personally and they use local shops and other amenities.

Now the EHB plans to turn the home into a methadone and counselling clinic for heroin addicts. Those who have made their home in the elegant building in Cork Street must go. They will go to other EHB homes but that is all that is known so far of where they will be accommodated. No matter where they are moved to, they will be exiled from the community in which they now live. Some patients have told The Irish Times that they believe the effect on their mental health will be detrimental. The EHB claims that the move, to "superior accommodation", was planned before the methadone clinic was mooted. Nevertheless, it came as a surprise to the residents of the home, some of whom told The Irish Times that they first heard of it from local people. The Psychiatric Nurses' Association says those responsible for managing the home were shocked by the news.

Two arguments may be advanced against allowing the residents to remain in the Weir Home. The first is that the building is needed for a methadone clinic. That treatment facilities for people trying to give up heroin are badly needed is indisputable. But how many of us would be willing to leave our homes to make way for a clinic? If the need for a clinic provides a justification for moving people on, could the EHB not vacate part of its splendid headquarters opposite Heuston Station and decentralise some of its staff to, say, Mulhuddart? And is it not the case that, due to road widening plans which never materialised, Cork Street contains more derelict sites than the average Irish town?

The second argument is that the building is old - it used to be the nurses' home for a fever hospital - and too institutional for the residents. But the building is graceful, airy and well lit and each resident has his own room. In the "superior accommodation" to which they are to be moved, they will have to share rooms. Which is the more institutional? It has pleasant grounds to the front, which the EHB has chosen, in spite of requests to the contrary from local people, to hide with ugly corrugated sheeting.

If the Weir Home has defects they can surely be put right. After all, it is going to be refurbished for drug addicts. Why can it not be refurbished instead for the 24 people who live there? The two EHB officials with the clout to do something about this situation, Mr Michael Walsh, programme manager for special hospital care and Mr P.J. Fitzpatrick, the board's newly appointed chief executive, are men with an enviable reputation for administrative ability. By intervening in this situation with their considerable authority and resources they can surely find a way to provide drug treatment facilities in the area without depriving 24 innocent people of their home. Such an intervention would be far more in keeping with the EHB's fine record in this area than the unjust development which is being proposed at the moment.