

The Herald

Sex bias claim against housing plan Tory attacks proposal

Published on 24 Apr 1999

Plans to build Scotland's first women-only housing complex were yesterday attacked as "blatant discrimination and a waste of taxpayer's money". Women, some with children, are queuing up to take part in the development in Glasgow city centre. But Conservative Housing spokesman Bill Aitken said: I can't understand the logic of having a housing development like this." The group Take Root has been told it will receive thousands of pounds in public funding from Scottish Homes to build up to 12 timber homes for its women-only members. It also plans to hire women contractors, architects, and designers to do the work. Take Root and Molendinar Housing Association are applying for around #400,000 worth of funding from Scottish Homes. They also plan to apply for further funding from European agencies sources for workshops and training opportunities. The move comes just days after the announcement of an adults-only housing estate in the Highlands for the over 50s. Mr Aitken said: "It is blatant discrimination and should never be funded from the public's purse. "I'm sure some of the women may have had a hard time living with men in the past but I don't think this is the right way to go about it." The Equal Opportunities Commission also warned that the group could be breaking the law. Mrs Muriel Robison, principal legal officer, said: "If men are not allowed to rent the houses then it appears to be unlawful discrimination. It is very unusual and I have never heard of this before so they should be very careful before they go ahead." Mrs Robison added: "If a man decided he wanted to live there and take them to court then he could. "If it's a non profit making voluntary group then they may be okay but I would advise them to check the law very carefully." The group is working in partnership with Molendinar Housing Association in Dennistoun. Ten women have already signed up for the project which is scheduled to begin next January and will take up to 18 months. Group member Adele Patrick, 37, said: "We don't see ourselves as a feminist group. "We're a diverse group of women who want to live in a female-only complex for positive reasons. "It isn't a shelter and we are certainly not victims." She added: "We believe women's housing needs have been overshadowed in the past because of a male dominated industry. "But there are some tradeswomen out there, as well as architects and we plan to hire them where we can. "You can't deny that men and women are different, now we want to create a female-only environment that suits our needs. "It will not be a male-free zone, just female tenants." Councillor Jim McCarron, convener of housing at Glasgow City Council also voiced concern at the women-only policy. He said: "Women-only housing, black-only housing, where does it all end? I've never heard of Take Root and this is the first time I've heard of this project." Glasgow City Council owns the site in the Gallowgate and is expected to sell it to the group for development. To be eligible for one of the homes, tenants must agree to take an active role in building the properties including a period of training. Mr Rob Joiner, director of Molendinar Housing Association, said: "Take Root are part of our association but we do not

dictate what rules they make. "We help them both in administration and training but as far as their female-only policy goes it will be interested to see how that works out." Ms Fiona Hyslop, SNP housing spokeswoman, said: "We would support any housing project which aims to provide homes, jobs and training. "Projects like this should be encouraged." A Scottish Homes spokesman said: "We have been in discussions with Molendinar Housing Association and are awaiting their proposals before we can give a final decision on whether or not to hand over taxpayers' money."