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NO. 044 P002

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FROM: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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cc - JH
✓ CBY
Trevor-B.John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1A 2AA

16 December 1996

Dear John

CHARITON

Further to our conversation this morning, we have re-examined the arrangements for CHARITON, in particular the security arrangements and the potential for protests or disruption.

A Christmas visit has now become predictable and there has been a high level of expectation that CHARITON would be in the Province.

The Sunday World story, copied to you this morning, does not reveal any of the locations to be visited and the reference to opening the new pipeline pumping gas into the Province is - helpfully - inaccurate. The pipeline has already been opened and CHARITON is being asked to connect the first customer. The location is generally regarded as a safe area.

RUC advice is that the visit can still proceed, although the police will increase their precautions as a result of the press story.

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Programme Balance

Uncertain weather in mid-December makes flying unpredictable therefore, although the entire visit is programmed for flying, it has also been constructed so that almost all would be drivable. In the event of non-flying the Primary School has to be dropped from CHARITON's programme, but should still be visited by Mrs CHARITON. This inevitably means that the balance is tilted towards the predominantly unionist East of the Province. Dungannon, the location of the first civilian engagement, is as far West as we can safely go logistically, and is a mixed location (approximately half protestant and half catholic); the primary school is a state school and is therefore predominantly protestant. The MP is UUP - Ken Maginnis.

Carrickfergus, the second location, is predominantly unionist, the MP being UUP also - Roy Beggs. The lunch venue is in Robert McCartney's constituency, UK unionist, but he will be one of approximately 100 guests. The only opportunity for an SDLP MP, therefore, is the walk-about in Eddy McGrady's constituency. The Local Council is predominantly SDLP, but voting patterns for the town itself in the last local Government elections returned 2 UUP, 2 SDLP and 1 DUP Councillor. Ballynahinch is therefore as balanced a location as could be reached in the time available and one of the few country towns that CHARITON has not yet visited. It is genuinely "middle Ulster" with population largely drawn from an agricultural background.

Ballynahinch - Security

From a security aspect there are some permanent pedestrian barriers which will assist crowd control, and while maverick

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protestors cannot be ruled out (and RUC will be briefed to deal with such), there are no obvious topics of contention in this area and no particular community problems in recent days.

Our security advisors remain content about this location, which is, of course, not mentioned in the Sunday World story. They will, of course, keep this under review. Given that there would be a limited number of secure alternatives, and the difficulty in arranging an alternative venue, a change is not recommended.

As the Secretary of State is travelling and uncontactable, it has not been possible to clear the above advice with him.

Signed

ROBERT CRAWFORD

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