

SIGHTHILL QUESTIONS FOR INDIA



Boys playing football in Sighthill Cemetery, Glasgow, 1976 <https://www.johnsturrock.com/index>

How did you come across/find out about Sighthill?

In April 2019, the charity New Rhythms For Glasgow (NRFG) hired me as leading artist to develop the 'Designing Sighthill's Bandstand' participatory project. This is funded by Glasgow City Council, the main partner in charge of the large scale development that has been happening in the area since 2009 approx. (better to check dates, I'm not sure about them, I know it's being a long process though)

How did you find out about the 'soda waste', aka the dumped hydrogen sulphide, or red soil, in the area?

The first person that talked to me about the area was the community artist from NRFG working in Sighthill ([REDACTED]). She started telling me about St. Rollox Chemical Works that mainly produced bleach for the textile industry. She explained how the whole area was a tenement slum embracing the factory, which was polluting the air even to the point of turning the sky red. The description is strongly visual and deeply perceptive. Then the architect from the city council ([REDACTED]), in charge of the new plan, told me specifically about the 'Stinky Ocean' saying that it was also a dump for local butchers, which contribute to the smell. After them, other people made reference to the 'Stinky Ocean' but no one that has really seen it in person. I am not sure about the exact time when the development started, I know that the neighbours feel it's been for too long, making them change their habits and closing their usual roads without previous notice. I also think that it's been considered a work site, early on before the actual works started, because the soil needed to regenerate and breathe.

How do you feel about the 'soda waste' being dumped there and its' impact on the local community?

I can see it as a consequence of early Industrial Revolution, when worker living conditions and environmental issues were not on the agenda of governments, councils and companies. I would like to say that nowadays we are more aware of these problems, but what I really think is that we've just moved the factories where they can not be seen, which means industrializing and polluting other areas and beyond that, other countries, with less restrictions and cheaper labour.

Focusing on Sighthill, I think is a paradoxical place. On one hand, you can see how this industrial past turned the area into an actual dump, and that situation extended through the centuries turning it into a symbolic dump, when the decline of the high flats happened.

On the other, the neighbours have a strong connection and sense of pride with Sighthill. They also have the feeling of having been mistreated, and therefore deep mistrust on any government, council and/or company. I see them a little bit like the 'village of the irreducible Gauls'.

Have you heard anyone from the area describe the Stinky Ocean? (More about the Stinky Ocean can be found here: <https://www.glasgowlive.co.uk/news/history/remembering-stinky-ocean-toxic-pool-17755449>)

I haven't heard a clear description from someone who saw it. It seems like the Stinky Ocean reached a mythical level. I try to place it, comparing old and new maps, but the area has changed so much through time that it's not easy to find out where exactly it was.

As someone who will (soon) be visiting the area a lot more for the purposes of work, will you see the 'soda waste' or red soil become part of your understanding of the heritage of the area?

Indeed. Here is a fragment of the report handed to the city council after the Bandstand project finished last April:

“Sighthill is a neighbourhood in Glasgow well known for its connection to the Industrial Revolution. Currently, it is under a long-term development that is creating massive transformation in the area. ‘Designing Your Bandstand’ is a participatory project, aiming to involve the community in a creative process that will end in the building of ‘Sighthill Stage’, a bandstand placed within the new park. The project’s main aspiration is to nurture a sense of ownership and belonging, very necessary in an area that has experienced years of disruption and change.

As a first step to develop the project, we started by identifying the positive elements in Sighthill that make this area unique, such as the Stone Circle: a construction from the 70’s that places Sighthill at the center of the local universe, and that is probably the first circle built in the UK in 3000 years. It is an indisputable fact that not many areas can say they have a stone circle. So exclusive!

However, the oldest reference point is the cemetery. Its easy to recognize shape has not changed through the centuries and it is a clearly identified constant, in old maps and modern pictures. As in this classic photo, ‘Boys playing football in the cemetery’, where we can see the five tower blocks built in the 1960s (demolished in 2008). It is an image full of energy that portrays the strong living connection of Sighthill locals with the cemetery.

St.Rollox Works was the biggest chemical factory in Europe and also the one that gave the strongest identity to the area. Although this was not a positive reference in itself, as there are numerous histories about the smell and the air pollution created by the factory, the fact remains that there is still local pride in its industrial past. Despite the name, there is an unexpected affection for the Stinky Ocean, still fresh in the noses of those who knew it, and still in local collective memory, even though its is long gone.

Another Sighthill uniqueness is the reality of its multiracial neighbourhood, with Asian and African families bringing their own traditions, food and character to events and everyday life. Sighthill children are really a melting pot of joy and a source of inspiration to help the area face its future”.



Current map of Sighthill, use Pinkston Dr. as reference.
Out of the map we can find:

- North, Sighthill Cemetery
- South, M8
- East, rail road and canal
- West, Sprinburg Road and Tesco



Top: Old factory
Bottom: The high flats and the supposed location of the Stinky Ocean

