

# **BSC - LOCA Evaluation (January 2024)**

## **Building Successful Communities (BSC)**

The Building Successful Communities initiative was introduced as part of the Facing the Future - Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland in 2013 and aimed to use housing intervention as one of the main catalysts for local regeneration.

Source: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/housing/building-successful-communities>

## **Strategic Aims**

The strategic aims were:

- To work collaboratively across government, with the NIHE (Housing Executive), Housing Associations, and communities to improve housing and infrastructure.
- To improve current housing stock, deliver new social and affordable homes and bring empty homes into use.
- To target ways to bring physical, economic and social regeneration to each area.
- To use housing interventions as the driver to regenerate these areas and start to reverse community decline.

Source: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/housing/building-successful-communities>

## **Pilot Areas**

Six pilot areas were selected, five are within Belfast and one is in Ballymena. The pilot areas were:

- Tigers Bay & Mountcollyer.
- Lower Oldpark & Hillview.
- Lower Falls.
- Lower Shankill & Brown Square.
- Lenadoon & Glencolin.
- Doury Road (Ballymena).

Source: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/housing/building-successful-communities>

## **Regeneration Forums**

Regeneration Forums were established in each of the pilot areas to take work forward and develop plans with tailor-made economic, physical and social interventions to meet community needs.

Membership of regeneration forums was assembled from the Housing Executive, community representatives, council officials, housing associations, elected representatives and representatives from education, health and the voluntary and community sectors.

Regeneration managers were recruited for each area to support the work of the forums. The Department played a lead role in supporting the forums to identify the issues in their area and to develop and implement solutions relating to housing, regeneration, infrastructure,

employment and social enterprise, together with other issues which the forum feels is important.

Source: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/housing/building-successful-communities>

### BSC Initiative Duration

The BSC initiative was established in 2013 and was ended in 2023.

The Section 75 Policy Screening document, Part 1 (page 2) advised that the Building Successful Communities housing led regeneration pilot programme was programmed to run until March 2020. LOCA understands the initiative formally ended in 2023.

### Budget/ Expenditure Comparison

Year	Opening Budget Allocation	Budget	Final Budget Allocation	Actual Spend	Underspend (OBA/ AS)
2015/16	£3,000,000		£1,882,000	£1,958,730	£1,041,270
2016/17	£2,006,000		£652,000	£1,065,723	£940,277
2017/18	£3,270,000		£370,000	£288,319	£2,981,681
2018/19	£3,500,000		£337,000	£133,077	£3,366,923
2019/20	£2,365,000		£1,303,000	£507,313	£1,857,687
2020/21	£3,814,000		£2,505,000	£1,509,142	£2,304,858
2021/22	£3,547,000		£2,700,000	£2,321,273	£1,225,727
2022/23	£2,600,000		£2,100,000	£1,961,301	£638,699
<b>Total</b>	<b>£24,102,000 (100%)</b>		<b>£11,849,000 (49%)</b>	<b>£9,744,878 (40% of OBA) ((82% of FBA)</b>	<b>£14,357,122 (60% of OBA) (18% of FBA)</b>

Table 1

There was an underspend of 60 percent on the Opening Budget Allocations (combined total over 8 years) and an 18 percent underspend on the Final Budget Allocation (combined total over 8 years). It must be noted that some BSC schemes are ongoing or haven't started. It is unclear why there was such a large difference between the Opening Budgets Allocations and the Final Budget Allocations. There were significant reductions across all years of the programme but particularly during the early years.

### Catalyst Projects

DfC designated 16 Catalyst Projects across six BSC Pilot Areas. Please note that SHDP refers to a social housing scheme, HDG refers to a Housing Development Grant scheme, and BSC refers to a Building Successful Communities scheme.

Area	Catalyst Project Title	Status
Tigers Bay and Mountcollyer	Social housing scheme at Halidays Road (SHDP).	Complete 2016/17
Tigers Bay and Mountcollyer	Social housing scheme at Hogarth Street (SHDP).	Complete 2017/18
Tigers Bay and Mountcollyer	Affordable housing at Gainsborough (HDG)	On Site

Lower Shankill and Browns Square	Hopewell housing (HDG initial designation)	Partial Completion  Phase 1 (18 Social Units) Complete 22/23  Awaiting Start Phase 2 (28 Units – tenure undecided) 24/25
Lower Shankill and Browns Square	North Boundary Street affordable housing (HDG).	Under Consideration
Lower Shankill and Browns Square	Boyd Street social housing scheme (SHDP).	Awaiting Start 2024/25
Lower Shankill and Browns Square	Bullring EI scheme (BSC)	Complete 2023
Lower Oldpark and Hillview	Cliftonpark Avenue affordable housing scheme (HDG)	Complete 2021
Lower Oldpark and Hillview	Manor/ Alloa social housing scheme (SHDP).	On Site 2023
Lower Oldpark and Hillview	Courts EI scheme (BSC).	Complete 2021
Lower Falls	Ross Street Flats (SHDP)/ Roumania Rise (SHDP)/ Maureen Sheenan Centre (SHDP)	On Site 2023
Lenadoon and Glencolin	Carrigart Flats (BSC)	Complete 2019
Lenadoon and Glencolin	Carrigart Flats (SHDP)	Did Not Proceed
Lenadoon and Glencolin	Pylon Site (SHDP)	Did Not Proceed
Doury Road	Creation of central hub area (BSC)	On Site 2023
Doury Road	Regent Park housing development (SHDP)	Complete 2021/22

Table 2

The number of Catalyst Projects allocated to each of the six areas, and a summary of Catalyst Project progress in each of the six Areas is summarised below.

Pilot Areas	Number of Catalyst Projects	Status
Tigers Bay and Mountcollyer	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete.</li> <li>• Complete.</li> <li>• On Site.</li> </ul>
Lower Shankill and Browns Square	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete</li> <li>• Partial Completion.</li> <li>• Under Consideration.</li> <li>• Awaiting Start.</li> </ul>

Lower Oldpark and Hillview	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete.</li> <li>• Complete.</li> <li>• On Site.</li> </ul>
Lower Falls	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On Site.</li> <li>• On site.</li> </ul>
Lenadoon and Glencolin	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete.</li> <li>• Did Nort Proceed.</li> <li>• Did Not Proceed.</li> </ul>
Doury Road	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On Site.</li> <li>• Complete.</li> </ul>

Table 3

Of the 16 designated Catalyst Projects:

- 7.5 are Complete.
- 5 are On Site.
- 1 is Under Consideration.
- 1.5 are Awaiting Start.
- 2 Did Not Proceed.

The BSC initiative was established in 2013. Preparation of Action Plans for each the six Pilot Areas was complete in September/ October 2016. By January 2024, only 7.5 (less than half) of the Catalyst Projects were complete. Of those completed:

- One was completed in 2016/17.
- One was completed in 2017/18.
- One was completed in 2019.
- Two were complete in 2021.
- One was complete in 2021/22.
- One was complete in 2023
- Half was complete in 2022/23.

Half of all the Projects were completed in or after 2021. In January 2024, five Project were on site, one was still under consideration and 1.5 sites were waiting to start. This data indicates the slow progress of the BSC initiative in bringing about neighbourhood regeneration. Covid would not have impacted Projects completed from 2021, however, only three Projects had been completed by 2019.

### Social Housing Development

Estimated Social Housing Development Programme Cost By Project/ Estimated Units/ Actual Units Provided/ Status At May 2023/ Actual Spend

Name	Location	Est Cost (£k) OBC May 2017	Est Cost (£k) SBC October 2017	Est Units	Status At January 2024	Actual Units	Actual Spend
Social Housing scheme at Hallidays Road	Tigers Bay and Mountcollyer	£439.8	£440	6	Complete 2016/17	6	£384,770

Social Housing scheme at Hogarth Street	Tigers Bay and Mountcollyer	£1,466	£1,466	20	Complete 2017/18	20	£1,399,572
Social Housing Scheme at Hopewell (Phase 1)	Lower Shankill and Brown Square			18	Complete 2022/23	18	£1,551,259
Social or Private Housing Scheme at Hopewell (Phase 2)	Lower Shankill and Brown Square	No scheme costs yet.	No scheme costs yet.	28	Awaiting Start 2024/25	28	No scheme costs yet.
Boyd Street Social Housing	Lower Shankill and Brown Square	£733	£733	10	Awaiting Start 2024/25	12	No scheme costs yet.
Manor Street/Alloa Street Housing	Lower Oldpark and Hillview	£1,172.8	£1,470	12	(On Site May 2023)	12	£1,579,640
Roumania Rise/ Ross Street Flats/ Maureen Sheehan Centre	Lower Falls	£2,639	£1,027	14	On Site January 2023	24	£3,692,496
Carrigart Flats	Lenadoon and Glencolin	£4,398	Nil	NA	Did Not Proceed	NA	NA
Corrib Flats	Lenadoon and Glencolin	£2,199	£1,246	17	On Site March 2023	23	£2,538,470
Pylon Site	Lenadoon and Glencolin	£463	£463	NA	Did Not Proceed	NA	NA
Distillery Street	Lower Falls	Nil	£855	NA	Did Not Proceed	NA	NA
Regents Park	Doury Road	Nil	£400	11	Complete 201/22	11	£842,276
<b>Total</b>		<b>£13.51m</b>	<b>£8.10m</b>	<b>136</b>		<b>154</b>	<b>£11,988,483</b>

Table 4

### Budget

There was a 40 percent reduction in the estimated public expenditure budget for social housing from the OBC (May 2017) estimated budget to the SBC (October 2017) estimated budget figure. The main reasons for this seem to be the removal of the Carrigart Flats and a reduction in the anticipated cost of the Corrib Flats.

By January 2024, actual public expenditure on social housing provision was £11,988,483, exceeding estimated costs in October 2017 by £3,668,483. However, this doesn't take account of expected additional expenditure (figures unknown) on a further 1.5 schemes (1 scheme if half scheme is a private development).

### Units Built

The projected number of units to be provided in BSC Pilot Areas was 136. The actual number of social housing units completed/ likely to proceed under the umbrella of BSC is 154 across nine schemes. This includes properties that are completed, are on site, and are waiting to start. An additional three schemes did not proceed. Actual units provided exceed planned units by 18 units. However, three schemes didn't proceed. LOCA isn't aware of the total number of units included within the three abandoned schemes although it understands that one scheme (Distillery Street) included 36 units.

### BSC Strategic Business Case

It is questionable as to whether the provision of social housing in the six BSC Pilot Areas is a product of the BSC initiative. All social housing schemes are supported by a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA). It is therefore presumed that all the schemes in the BSC Pilot Areas would have been supported by a HNA and would have taken place regardless of an area's designation as a BSC Pilot Area. This raises the question of whether the £8.10M (Table 3) projected SHDP social housing expenditure ((£7,465,000 specified in the BSC Strategic Business Case – Annex E. Pages 51-52 – approved by DoF on 17.11.23), which would have been paid in the form of Housing Association Grant, should have been counted as BSC Pilot Project related capital expenditure. It is LOCA's view that it shouldn't as it is expenditure that would have taken place irrespective of the BSC Project.

The Northern Ireland Guide To Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation sets out the process for business case development. With large scale projects, DoF advocates a three-stage process – Strategic Outline Case (SOC), Outline Business Case (OBC) and Full Business Case (FBC). Section 8.5.3 advises that for all major projects and high-profile cases, departments are required to submit a SOC to DoF Supply for approval before proceeding to develop an OBC. The relevant cases in this context are:

- Capital projects with a capital value of £20M or more.
- All revenue projects which fall above the department's delegated limits and for which central government costs will be £20M or more over the project's life.
- All projects, irrespective of cost, that set precedents, are novel, are potentially contentious.

The BSC Strategic Business Case – Annex E. Pages 51-52 (approved by DoF on 17.11.17) estimated total BSC related costs at £27,415,000 including estimated SHDP related costs at £7,465,000. If SHDP costs had not been included as BSC related costs, the project would have had a capital value of £19,950,000 (below the £20M capital threshold). This approach would have meant that the process would have been quicker as DoF Supply approval of a SOC would not have been necessary. In addition, the total actual spend as at 2022/23 (Table 1), at £9,744,878, was just under a third of the projected expenditure of £27,415,000. There will, of course be additional expenditure to be included given the two social schemes awaiting a start. If the BSC initial budget figure (£27,415,000) had been closer to the actual expenditure figure of £9,744,878 (plus the cost of two awaiting social schemes), the BSC capital budget would

have been even further below the £20M capital figure. It is difficult to understand how the estimated budget figure of £27,415,000 was so high given actual expenditure figure. It appears that the impact of this budgeting was to draw out the process.

## Private Housing Development

Housing Development Grant (HDG) – Estimated Scheme Cost/Actual Spend/ Site Area/ Proposed Units

Area	Project	Site Ownership	Area (Hectares)	Proposed Units	Estimated Budget (£k)**	Actual Units	Actual Spend
Tigers Bay and Mountcollyer	Gainsborough	NIHE	1.27	81	£3,240	81	0.00
Lower Shankill and Brown Square	*Hopewell	NIHE	0.65	8	£320	0	0.00
Lower Shankill and Brown Square	North Boundary St	NIHE	0.12	16	£640	0	0.00
Lower Oldpark	Cliftonpark Avenue	NIHE	0.39	15	£600	5 (Plus 6 private houses provided without HDG plus a further 4 for which there is planning permission)	£246,967
<b>Total</b>			<b>2.43</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>£4,800</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>£246,967</b>

Footnote: \*The area IRO the Hopewell scheme relates to the Phase 1 development. Given the land relating to any future build has not been transferred, it should be noted the area measurement provided is indicative.

\*\* Breakdown as per BSC Strategic Business Case at October 2017

The estimated scheme cost by project was based on an average cost of £40k per unit (the per unit estimate in relation to the Cliftonpark Avenue scheme).

## Housing Impact

When estimating costs of Housing Development Grant (HDG), BSC identified four potential Catalyst Projects that might benefit from HDG. In practice, only one of these four Projects, in Lower Oldpark, benefited from HDG funding. The projected HDG cost for the Lower Oldpark scheme was £600,000, however, the actual HDG cost incurred was £246,967. This reduction arose from a reduction in the number of properties being built with HDG from 15 to five. Of the 15 to be built, five were built using HDG, six without HDG, and four haven't been started.

Out of the 120 houses projected to be developed with HDG financial support, 5 were provided (in Lower Oldpark). Out of a projected HDG spend of £4.8M, a total of £246,967 was actually spent (in Lower Oldpark). This represents an underspend of £4,553,033 (95 percent). This money went back to the general DfC budget and was lost to the BSC Pilot Areas. It is LOCA's view is that this didn't need to be the case. Two of the four schemes included in the costings didn't go ahead and one went ahead without HDG being paid. There were opportunities within the Pilot Areas for other sites to be released for private development and HDG to be paid. LOCA understands that such site release didn't have to be restricted to Catalyst Project sites (although additional schemes would have to be within BSC Pilot Areas). A notification that Housing Development Grant was open to application was published on the DfC website on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2019. LOCA is unaware if DfC took any further action to promote awareness of and uptake of HDG. If not, it is not surprising that there were no further applications. Across the six BSC Pilot areas, 92 private houses are being/ have been provided on Catalyst Project sites, 81 on one site and 11 on a second. The development of 87 of these properties could have taken place without the existence of the BSC initiative as the no HDG was paid and the sites were release on the open market.

#### Time Taken To Put HDG In Place.

DfC began looking at the option of a housing grant to support private housing development in BSC Pilot Areas in early 2015 (LO BSC Forum Meeting 24.4.15 Minutes). This reference to HDG type grant was 22 months prior to a HDG addendum to the original BSC Strategic Outline Case being approved by DoF in January 2017 and approximately three years before the Grant was approved and became available. Why did it take nearly two years to get from a point of a HDG grant being discussed to a position where an addendum to the original BSC Strategic Outline Case was approved by DoF?

At a BSC Programme Board meeting on 4.11.15 SM outlined that DSD has been exploring the possibility of introducing a Housing Development Grant to facilitate the development of private affordable housing in areas of deprivation and market failure. He [REDACTED] said that it was hoped that 'in-house' approval could be obtained over the next few months and then approvals would then need to be sought from the European Commission. He indicated that this had been modelled closely on Urban Development Grant. It is LOCA's view that this pointed to the potential for a speedy introduction of Housing Development Grant, however, this did not happen.

A Lower Oldpark BSC Forum Meeting on 7.10.16 was advised that 'DfC is in the final stages of developing the Housing Development Grant (HDG) which will be sent to DoF for approval in line with Departmental policy. This is the policy that will address any likely significant build to sale deficit for this affordable housing element.' It took a further 18 months approximately for final approval and for the HDG to become available. If DfC was in the final stages of developing a HDG how did it take a further 18 months for it to be finalised?

A Lower Oldpark BSC Forum meeting on 28.4.17 was advised that that DoF approval is still being sought regarding the Outline Business Case and that the Strategic Outline case was previously approved.

In correspondence to LOCA dated 10.5.17, BSC advised that, 'for BSC, the Strategic Outline Case was originally approved by DoF in March 2014. Alongside this, a separate process was



being developed to look at the potential to implement a Housing Development Grant similar to the Urban Development Grant but specific to housing. DoF advice was that this should be limited to BSC and therefore should form part of the BSC Strategic Outline Case. An addendum to the original SOC was then prepared and approved by DoF in January 2017’.

It is unclear why DoF required the introduction of a new grant (HDG) when UDG was in place and could have been opened up for grant applications at appropriate times to support private housing schemes in BSC Pilot Areas in the same way UDG was opened to receive a funding application to support the Portrush Regeneration Programme involving payment of UDG to help fund developers to bring derelict and vacant properties back into economic use. UDG was identified as being crucial to the town’s long-term regeneration and would continue after the 148<sup>th</sup> Open, Royal Portrush. LOCA understands that the UDG Scheme was closed and was opened specifically to receive the Portrush applications and was subsequently closed. Why could such UDG flexibility not have been applied to BSC Pilot Areas such as Lower Oldpark? In addition, LOCA is surprised that Portrush meets needs criteria to be eligible for UDG. LOCA understands that the Social Needs (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 enables DfC to ‘provide financial assistance for anybody or person doing or intending to do in a district where there exist one or two areas of social need under anything falling within paragraph (2)’. Paragraph (2) sets out a range of activities relevant to the Portrush support provided. However, it is unclear how Portrush meets the ‘district where there exists one or two areas of social need’ requirement.

In the correspondence dated 10.5.17, BSC advised that ‘Following completion of the action plans for the six pilot areas, the outline business case for BSC was finalised. This is currently being reviewed by Departmental economists. Following their review, the business case will be sent to ■ for his approval before being formally submitted to DoF for their approval.’ It took approximately another year for the initiative to be implemented.

A Lower Oldpark BSC Forum meeting on 6.10.17 was advised that, ‘Further meetings have taken place with DfC economists resulting in additional amendments to the SBC carried out as requested in advance of being sent to the DoF for final approval. It is now hoped that we will receive DoF approval of the HDG in a matter of weeks.’

A BSC Sub-group meeting on 11.9.17 was advised that BSC has provided answers to the final set of questions from the DfC economists in relation to the proposed Housing Development Grant (HDG) for BSC areas. If the DfC economists are satisfied, the proposals will go to DF for final approval. BSC is hopeful of approval by DoF within weeks. Details of the nature of the new HDG will be made available following approval by DF. Subject to approval, Lower Oldpark will be the first of the six BSC Pilot Areas where HDG will be used.

A BSC Sub-group meeting on 20.11.17 was advised that, ‘the Strategic Business Case for the proposed Housing Development Grant (HDG) has been approved by DfC. It now has to go to the Department of Finance (DoF) for approval.’ The meeting was also advised by BSC that ‘the Lower Oldpark HDG proposal has been approved by Department for Communities (DfC) economists and now has to be approved by the Permanent Secretary. It then has to be approved by the DfF. BSC anticipates that ‘the process will not have been completed until after Christmas 2017’.

A BSC Sub-group meeting on 4.12.17 was advised that the Strategic Business Case for the proposed Housing Development Grant (HDG) has been agreed by the Department for Finance (DfF)'.

The meeting was also advised that 'the Lower Oldpark HDG proposal had been approved by senior Department for Communities (DfC) managers and was now with the DfC Permanent Secretary. It then has to be approved by the DfF'. BSC anticipated that 'the process will be completed during the first quarter of 2018.'

A BSC Sub-group meeting on 26.1.18 was advised that, 'Department of Finance approved the BSC Strategic Business Case, which included Housing Development Grant, on 17 December. As part of that approval, each individual Housing Development Grant scheme's Economic Appraisal (EA) must be sent to the Department of Finance for approval. The EA for the Cliftonpark Avenue scheme was signed off by the DfC Permanent Secretary on 9 January and is now with the Department of Finance for approval.'

A BSC Sub-group meeting on 7.2.18 was advised by BSC that 'DoF continued to consider the full business case for HDG for Lower Oldpark. DoF has provided DfC with a number of related questions and DfC has responded. It is hoped that a decision will have been made in the next couple of weeks in relation to whether the Lower Oldpark scheme will, subject to need, be eligible for HDG.'

At the same BSC Sub-group meeting on 7.2.18, LOCA highlighted 'the very long time taken by DfC to complete the introduction of the HDG policy'. LOCA also 'highlighted the Lower Oldpark BSC Forum meeting (7.10.16) Minutes in which a BSC update specified that 'DfC is in the final stages of developing the Housing Development Grant (HDG) which will be sent to DoF for approval in line with Department policy.' BSC advised that 'what was being referred to was the strategic outline case and not the full business case relating specifically to Lower Oldpark'. BSC confirmed that the 'HDG development and approval process had, to date, lasted two years'. LOCA enquired as to 'whether policy development process normally took this amount of time'. BSC said that 'it varied depending on the policy'.

A BSC Sub-group Meeting 27.3.18 was advised by BSC that 'all necessary approvals had been received from the DoF and the DfC Departmental Solicitors' Office in relation to the use of Housing Development Grant in the Lower Oldpark BSC area.'

At a Lower Oldpark BSC Forum meeting on 25.5.18, BSC stated 'there has been considerable progress since the last Forum meeting with Housing Development Grant (HDG) now finalised with the HDG Application Pack having been issued to Apex for the first 5 houses on Site A – the small site.'

LOCA would highlight the following:

- It took approximately three years for Housing Development Grant to be put in place. This process did not include the introduction of legislation.
- On 4.11.15, [REDACTED] of DfC outlined that DSD has been exploring the possibility of introducing a Housing Development Grant to facilitate the development of private affordable housing in areas of deprivation and market failure. He [REDACTED] said that it was hoped that 'in-house' approval could be obtained over the next few months and then approvals would then need to be sought from the European Commission. It took a further 28 months approximately

for final approval and for the HDG to become available. [REDACTED] wording points to a process much quicker than occurred.

- On 7.10.16, BSC advised that DfC is in the final stages of developing the Housing Development Grant (HDG) which will be sent to DoF for approval in line with Department policy. This wording does not refer to the strategic outline case, but, instead points clearly to the whole HDG process nearing completion.
- The slow pace of HDG introduction in practice is inconsistent with statements made in terms of expected progress during the process.
- The major delays to HDG being given approval caused significant delay to the availability of grant aid to support private housing development in Lower Oldpark and, potentially in other BSC Pilot Areas. In relation to Lower Oldpark, it significantly held back the regeneration process.
- It is unclear why UDG was opened up for the Portrush applications at the time of the Open Golf Tournament but couldn't have been opened up for private housing developments in BSC Pilot Areas, areas of significant social need.

## **Catalyst Projects**

LOCA sought to secure the designation of the 'Bonfire Site' in Lower Oldpark as a Catalyst Project site on which private housing could be built. BSC and DfC to the highest level obstructed this. This reinforced LOCA's growing sense of BSC being an initiative that was very much under the tight control of DfC, that lacked responsiveness and that wanted to limit the scale and speed of regeneration in the area.

## **BSC Forums**

### Chairmanship

During a BSC Programme Board meeting on 31.3.14 (s6), [REDACTED] indicated that 'in the short-term DSD would chair the forums. [REDACTED] stated that after a few meetings the dynamics of the Forums would be known and then rotation of the chair would be considered.'

During a BSC Programme Board meeting on 12.3.15 [REDACTED] indicated that up until now the Forums have been chaired by DSD. He suggested that it may be time to review this situation with the option of giving more ownership to the community and DSD playing a key support role. This would be judged on the maturity of each forum. [REDACTED] said that there was a timing issue as to when this should be done, and he felt that the time was not just right. He indicated that the long-term view should be for the community to see this Programme through to fruition. [REDACTED] asked if co-chairing could be considered as this would show Government's commitment but give ownership to communities.'

In the end, BSC retained this responsibility, and it is LOCA's view that this weakened the position of the community in the meetings and provided a message to non -BSC Forum members about who was in control.

### Forum Role

The BSC Regeneration Forum Code of Practice and Guiding Principles Version 1.1 sets out the responsibilities of BSC Forums. One of these responsibilities is 'Review the Action Plan (of Pilot Areas) annually to ensure that they reflect the priority needs in an area. This did not

happen with the BSC led Lower Oldpark Pilot Area Forum and LOCA is unaware if it happened with other BSC Pilot forums. This substantially weakened the potential for Forum members to change BSC responses to neighbourhood needs.

### Forum Budget

At the BSC Programme Board meeting on 31.3.14, ■■■ asked if the Forums will have their own budget. ■■■ explained that they will identify priorities but will not commit to any spend.

At the BSC Programme Board meeting on 4.12.14, ■■■ outlined that as we had started to engage with communities and build expectations this posed a challenge moving forward particularly with the budgetary position. He said that Statutory Bodies attending the forums need to be in a position to provide clarity on what can and cannot be delivered. It is clear to LOCA from this that BSC wanted to limit community expectations.

At a BSC Programme Board meeting on 4.12.14, ■■■ said that the availability of a budget could be a double edged sword with the temptation to focus on the £3m. This is further evidence of DfC's desire to limit community expectations.

At the BSC Programme Board meeting on 4.12.14, ■■■ asked members if they felt that Risk 1 – budgetary constraints should be escalated? ■■■ said that it remained high risk but there was also a risk to participation from partner organisations given the budget cuts. ■■■ indicated that this has already been noticed at recent forum meetings. ■■■ asked members to stress the importance within their organisations of attending forum meetings. This is further evidence of DfC's desire to limit community expectations.

### **Programme Overview Report**

At the BSC Programme Board meeting on 19.5.14, ■■■ outlined the Programme Overview Report. 'It provides a quarterly overview of information such as key targets, key successes, number of forum meetings, stakeholder feedback and the status of each pilot area.' Copies of these Reports were not available to view. It is LOCA's view that this lack of transparency weakened the position of communities with regard to their relationship with BSC. It could also be construed as indicating a lack of trust.

### **Post Project Evaluations**

Completing a Post Project Evaluation is a government requirement. LOCA is unaware of any Post Project Evaluations carried out in relation to the two Lower Oldpark Catalyst Projects being completed to date or indeed any other completed BSC Catalyst Projects.

### **Lower Oldpark**

#### Impact

Under BSC, Lower Oldpark benefited from BSC funding for a number of initiatives:

- Area wide environmental improvements completed in 2016/17 at a cost of £57,000.
- LOCA Prefab completed 2015/16 at a cost of £16,950.
- LOCA premises refurbishment completed in 2016/17 at a cost of £56,667.
- Upgrade of street lighting completed in 2016/17 at a cost of £100,678.

Bike docks provided at Girdwood at a cost of £76,716 and completed in 2017/18 did not really benefit the people of Lower Oldpark.

In addition to the above, there were three Lower Oldpark Catalyst Projects:

- Courts Project that involved major public realm improvement in seven Lower Oldpark housing courts. This project brought significant public realm improvements, however, significant resident dissatisfaction with aspects of the plans came to the fore during the work which was completed in early 2022. Parking arrangements in one court worsened. DfC failed to take the lead in terms of consulting the community in relation to the plans. The community consultation role was taken on by LOCA Housing Project Worker in the absence of DfC action.
- Cliftonpark Avenue Affordable Housing Scheme. This scheme involved the development of five 'affordable' homes on a NIHE owned site at the junction of Oldpark Road and Crumlin Road. Despite HDG of £246,967 being paid to the developer, the houses were sold in 2021 for about £110,000. The developer would not work with LOCA to promote the properties for sale among residents of Lower Oldpark and the Greater Shankill. LOCA is unaware of any DfC (BSC) challenge to the developer in relation to this.
- Manor/ Alloa/ Annalee social housing scheme. This scheme received NIHE approval in early 2018 and went on site five years later in early 2023. This scheme was designated as a BSC Catalyst Project, however, all schemes must be supported by a NIHE housing needs assessment, so the scheme could have gone ahead regardless of Catalyst Project designation.

A further Lower Oldpark site at the junction of Cliftonpark Avenue and Crumlin Road was to form part of the affordable housing scheme referred to above but was detached from this at the request of LOCA and sold on the open market and was developed with a retail unit/ petrol station and six private houses. No HDG was paid in respect of this development. This project could have happened regardless of BSC.

Ten years after the introduction of BSC, 11 new houses have been completed (5 supported by BSC) and the development of 12 social houses is ongoing.

### Forum Meetings

In correspondence dated 21<sup>st</sup> August 2019, LOCA said, 'LOCA does support the ending of the quarterly BSC meetings and making the September 2019 meeting the last one. LOCA's reason for this perspective is reflected in the view it expressed in correspondence dated 8<sup>th</sup> June 2018 to the previous Lower Oldpark BSC Forum Chairperson, ■■■, namely, 'BSC sees itself, and not the Forum, as the decision-maker. It is clear to LOCA that its BSC Forum representatives and other non-BSC Forum members are only window dressing'.

### LOCA Proposed Catalyst Project

During 2017, LOCA requested that DfC classify a vacant peaceline site in Lower Oldpark as a Catalyst Project which could be released for private housing development, potentially supported by HDG. A peaceline site would be appropriate for consideration of HDG to support private housing development. DfC, to its highest level, refused to designate the site as a Catalyst Project.

If the site had been designated a Catalyst Project, an affordable owner-occupier housing scheme with family homes could be in place now, similar to the other affordable scheme provided in Lower Oldpark with HDG.

BSC sought to defend its obstructive actions by referring to the need to demonstrate justification of LOCA's proposed scheme by awaiting progress in the Cliftonpark Avenue housing scheme, the work currently underway by NIHE to identify housing need for the Manor Street/ Alloa Street social housing proposal and the economic appraisal planned by the NIHE for the Mountview/ Beechpark/ Beechnut area. LOCA challenged this approach by BSC in relation to the Mountview/ Beechpark/ Beechnut scheme. Set out below is an extract from correspondence dated 8<sup>th</sup> June 2018 to BSC addressing the matter.

'LOCA wishes to restate its previously expressed view that such an approach by BSC in relation to the Mountview/ Beechpark/ Beechnut scheme is inconsistent with the approach that it employed in relation to the three, current Lower Oldpark BSC Catalyst Projects. Justifications for the latter were commissioned after they became Catalyst Projects in 2016. If this is not the case, please provide LOCA with details or copies of any economic appraisals/ business cases/ needs assessments etc that were carried out for the three Lower Oldpark Catalyst Projects before they were classified as Catalyst Projects in 2016.

The social housing need assessment for the Manor Alloa/ Annalee scheme has only recently been completed and the scheme is not yet in the social housing development programme. Despite this, it was classified as a Catalyst Project in 2016.

No justification was in place for the inclusion of the Cliftonpark Avenue Affordable Housing Scheme as a Catalyst Project in 2016. The BSC Strategic Business Case for Housing Development Grant (HDG) was not approved by the Department for Finance (DoF) until January 2018, while the business case for the provision of HDG for the Lower Oldpark scheme was not approved by the DoF until April 2018. The economic appraisal underpinning the release of the sites by the NIHE was not carried out before the scheme was classified as a Catalyst Project in 2016.

The Minutes of the Lower Oldpark BSC Forum meeting held on 2nd December 2016 indicate that it took no more than an in-depth discussion for it to be agreed that the Courts' Catalyst Project would be a good use of public money. At the same meeting, the Forum agreed to support all three proposed Catalyst Projects. The Minutes of BSC Forum meetings make no reference to the need for justification of the three Projects prior to them being classified as Catalyst Projects.

In your letter of 12th March 2018, you state that the existing Catalyst Projects were all agreed by the BSC Forum as priority projects. This is correct. You also state that the Forum's work to date has been focused on taking forward the existing Catalyst Projects. This is also correct. You state that the Mountview/ Beechpark/ Beechnut proposal had not been identified by the Forum as a priority scheme and therefore had not been included as a priority project in the Action Plan. This is correct. The LOCA Mountview/ Beechpark/ Beechnut proposal was not under consideration when the Action Plan was considered by the BSC Forum in 2016, so of course it could not have been included. The key issue is that BSC prevented, and continues to prevent, the BSC Forum from considering or making a decision on the inclusion of the Mountview/ Beechpark/ Beechnut scheme, or any other schemes, as Catalyst Projects in an updated Action

Plan. This indicates to LOCA that BSC sees itself, and not the Forum, as the decision-maker. It is clear to LOCA that its BSC Forum representatives and other non-BSC Forum members are only window dressing.'

#### Forum Annual Review of Action Plan

In correspondence dated 8<sup>th</sup> June 2018 to BSC, LOCA advised BSC that LOCA had reviewed the BSC Code of Practice and Guiding Principles document. LOCA identified that the document states that part of the role of the BSC Forum is to review its Action Plan annually to ensure that it reflects the priority needs in the area. Also, this Review is to be presented to the Programme Board (which LOCA understands, no longer exist) for acceptance. LOCA further advised BSC that it was unaware of the Lower Oldpark BSC Forum having been given the opportunity by its Chairperson to review the Action Plan on an annual basis. If they haven't been given opportunities to do this, it will mean that BSC Forum members will have been deprived of the chance to shape the Action Plan and the regeneration priorities of the area. Also, LOCA was unaware if annual review documents have been prepared and, if so, who has received and approved them. LOCA has not seen any annual review documents. If such documents have been prepared, perhaps you could provide LOCA with copies.