



HOUSING NEWS

Lower Oldpark

April 2019. Lower Oldpark Community Association, 9-23 Avoca Street, Belfast BT14 6EN. Tel: 02890351334. Email: loweroldparkhousing@gmail.com

Further Delay For Affordable Housing

A Lower Oldpark affordable housing scheme in the pipeline since 2014 has been delayed again.

The scheme of five terraced, affordable homes are to be developed on the open, green space at the Oldpark Road/ Cliftonpark Avenue junction.

The scheme developer, Apex Housing, completed a tender process for the appointment of a building contractor in March 2019. A tender report will be prepared by Apex and submitted to the Department for Communities (DfC). It will consider the report and decide if Housing Development Grant (HDG) is payable. Any grant payment will also have to be approved by the Department of Finance (DoF).

Apex applied for the grant aid to help cover development costs and so keep the houses more affordable.

It is unclear how long the grant approval processes will take or when building work might start.

A tender process during the summer of 2018 didn't result in a building contractor being appointed and there was concern that the scheme would be abandoned. Given the



Site for five new affordable houses

approvals still required, the future of the scheme is still uncertain.

Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) has advised the organisations involved in the process of its frustration and deep concern at the continuing delays and the uncertainty associated with the scheme.

Planning permission for the development of the five houses was granted in November 2015 and building work has still not started. The main cause of the delay was the two years taken by the DfC to develop the new HDG and for DfC and the DoF to approve it. The DfC decided to introduce HDG instead of using its existing Urban Development Grant.

New Lower Oldpark Housing Website

<https://loweroldparkhousing.co.uk/>

New Lower Oldpark Housing Facebook Page

@loweroldparkhousing

Health Risk Addressed By NIHE and Landowner

The problem of an overgrown and rubbish covered strip of land in Avoca Street has been addressed by its owners and by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

The land, which adjoins 16 Avoca Street, 4-6 Summerhill Court and 1 Summer Street, has been inaccessible for many years following the provision of a wooden fence across the entrance. As a result, the site became overgrown and a dumping ground. For a long time, it posed a health risk to local residents.

Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) had asked the NIHE to remove the vegetation and rubbish and to provide a gated railing. The NIHE did provide the gated railing but the owner of the adjoining building sent a contractor to clean up the site. The gate enables the land to be properly maintained in future.

Social Housing Scheme Start Target

The appointed developer of twelve new social houses in Lower Oldpark is targeting for building work to begin before April 2020.

Clanmil Housing is aiming to submit a planning application to Belfast City Council Planning Department for the development of the new homes by mid-summer 2019, approximately 16 months after the NIHE advised Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) that the NIHE could support the scheme. Subject to planning approval, Clanmil hopes that its building contractor will be on site by 31st March 2020.

The scheme will involve the development eight 3 bedroom houses and four 2 bedroom

houses on the existing open, green land fronting onto Manor Street, Alloa Street and the former Annalee Court.

Before the planning application for the new homes is submitted, Clanmil Housing will appoint architects, probably in mid-April 2019, to prepare scheme plans. The architects will consult LOCA on the plans and LOCA will organise a consultation event for the whole community.

When completed, all being well during the summer of 2021, the new homes will be allocated to applicants on the social housing waiting list on the basis of greatest need first.



Site for 12 new social houses

Planning Decision On Courts' Proposals Awaited

Planning approval for improvement work to seven Lower Oldpark housing courts is awaited from Belfast City Council Planning Department.

Seven planning applications for the replacement of the shared surfaces at the front of the houses in the courts were submitted by the scheme consultants, Aecom, in August 2018.

The courts affected by the proposals are Foyle, Shannon (plus 1-11 Shannon Street), Bann, Liffey, Bandon, Manor and Southport.

The current wait for planning approval for the schemes comes on the back of a six-month delay to the submission of the seven planning applications by the scheme consultants in 2018. The latter was the result of an error by the consultants.

Another problem has been the need to organise the transfer between organisations of many small pieces of land affected by the scheme. Issues with this could create further delays.

The Courts' Project work was supposed to begin last year when the Government money for the scheme was in place. However, because the work will not now begin until the next financial year, beginning in April 2019, a new funding bid has been prepared and submitted by the Department for Communities (DfC) to the Department for Finance (DfC). While it is hoped the bid will be successful, there is no guarantee.

Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) is extremely disappointed and frustrated by the continuing delays to the Lower Oldpark housing regeneration process.



Lower Oldpark Garden Survey 2018 Report Completed

The results of a major Lower Oldpark Garden Maintenance Survey have been made available for community feedback.

During a community consultation session at Lower Oldpark Community Centre on 26th February 2019, residents were able to see the results of the survey carried out by LOCA between October and December 2018. They were also able to put forward their ideas for an Action Plan to help tackle the garden problems.

A number of possible responses were discussed during the consultation session and it was agreed that Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) would invite senior Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) officers to the area to see a presentation of the results and to talk to local people about their experiences. LOCA has provided the NIHE with the invitation and awaits a response.

The survey results are contained in a report called 'Lower Oldpark Garden Survey 2018 Report' which is available on the Lower Oldpark Housing website - <https://loweroldparkhousing.co.uk/reports> .

Girdwood Housing Efforts Continue

Efforts by Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) and Lower Shankill Community Association (LSCA) to secure progress on the development of housing on the Girdwood site continue.

An open space site fronting onto Cliftonpark Avenue between 69 and the entrance to the Girdwood Centre is the preferred site for new housing that would form part of the Lower Oldpark community.

LOCA and LSCA are represented on the Girdwood Community Forum and have raised the issue of housing development on the site on a number of occasions. No progress on securing the start of a development process has been made. Sites within the Girdwood complex for non-housing uses have been given a higher priority by statutory bodies than the housing site fronting onto Cliftonpark Avenue.



LOCA is currently pushing hard to secure progress on the development of new housing on five other sites within the Lower Oldpark neighbourhood. This has, and continues to be, very challenging.

NIHE Preparing for Release of Mountview Street Land

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) is making preparations for the release, for development, of the open, green space it owns at Mountview Street.

Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) has informed the NIHE that it wishes to see new, affordable housing development on the site which is bounded by Mountview Street, the Oldpark Road peace wall, the back of 1-7 Manor Drive, the rear of 61-69 Oldpark Road and the back of 103-127 Manor Street.

Before releasing the land for development, the NIHE must carry out an economic appraisal. This involves examining the various options available for the use of the site and making a decision on which is the best. Work on the preparation of an economic appraisal is ongoing.

LOCA takes part in bi-monthly meetings during which it receives an update from the NIHE on progress.



Unclear Future for Crumlin Road/ Cliftonpark Avenue Site

The way in which the open, green space at the junction of Crumlin Road and Cliftonpark Avenue will be developed is now in question.

Planning approval was obtained in December 2018 for the construction on the site of 10 houses and a new petrol station and Euro-Spar retail unit. This proposal, from the owner of the existing Spar/ petrol station at Landscape Terrace, came to the fore in 2016 and gained political support as well as strong support from Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA). It was supported because it involved the building of ten new houses, the same number as included in an original proposal from Apex Housing for the same site. However, in addition, a new petrol station and Euro-Spar would be provided.

LOCA is deeply concerned at how the NIHE has managed the process to date. In 2016, it agreed a process for the release and development of the site. In February 2018, it advised that it could not follow this approach. The NIHE should have known and informed LOCA in 2016 that the agreed approach wasn't possible, instead of waiting for well over a year.

In March 2019, the owners of the site, the

Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), informed LOCA that it intended to release the site on the open market with no specification of what should be developed on it. This means that a developer who submits the highest bid for the site will be able to develop whatever they can obtain planning approval for. LOCA is concerned that this might result in a development that is unacceptable to the community such as a block of apartments. The site is designated by planners for housing. The new petrol station and shop proposal only received planning approval because the developer also proposed to build five new houses on the site of his existing shop and petrol station.

In March 2018, the NIHE proposed an alternative approach involving a part of the site being transferred to Apex Housing for the development of affordable housing. The remainder of the site would be considered as surplus to requirements and put on the open market for commercial development. A year later, in March 2019, the NIHE advised LOCA that it couldn't employ this approach. When the NIHE put forward this approach in March 2018, it would have known of potential problems associated with it.



After three years of shifting approaches by the NIHE, LOCA and the people of Lower Oldpark now face a dilemma. Do they support a process that could result in a new petrol station, Euro-Spar and ten new private houses but that could also result in development that is unacceptable to the community e.g. a block of apartments? Alternatively, LOCA and the community could support the original plans dating back to 2015 which involve the development of only ten affordable houses by Apex Housing. LOCA will consult residents on this issue.

Community Consulted On Proposed New Community Facilities



Lower Oldpark residents attended two consultations sessions on the type of development they would like to see on an open, green space site in Cliftonpark Avenue.

The piece of land sits beside 62 Cliftonpark Avenue and behind 25 Avoca Street. It is part of a larger green space stretching along Cliftonpark Avenue to Alloa Street.

The first of two drop-in sessions, on 12th February 2019 at the Lower Oldpark

Community Centre, gave residents the chance to say what they would like to see on the site. During the second sessions on 21st February 2019, residents were able to give their opinion on draft plans. Both sessions were led by consultants, Paul Hogarth Co.

Paul Hogarth Co took away the feedback it received and prepared outline plans for the development of the site. These will be made available within the community for residents to view.

The plans will be fed into a feasibility study being prepared by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) for the development of the whole site stretching from beside 62 Cliftonpark Avenue to Alloa Street. The NIHE has advised that this study should be complete by early April 2019. LOCA wishes to see the development of housing on the part of the site not covered by the new community facilities.

Funding for the development of the outline plans by Paul Hogarth Co was provided by the NIHE through its Community Support Fund.

Radius Flats Get External Tidy-up



Three blocks of Radius Housing flats in Avoca Street got a long-awaited external tidy-up recently.

Weeds and other vegetation were cleared from the communal areas at the front of 1-7, 35-41 and 51-53 Avoca Street.

The work was carried out following requests from Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA).

Lower Oldpark Let Down By Alley Gate Inaction

Inaction by Belfast City Council and Choice Housing mean that alley gates won't be provided at the entrances to an Oldpark Road alleyway.

In 2017, in response to reports of anti-social behavior in the alleyway running from Oldpark Road to Century Street, Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) asked Belfast City Council (BCC) to provide gates at the entrances. The Council said that the alleyway wasn't part of the Phase 4 alleys gating scheme it planned for Belfast and that there was no real prospect of getting the alleyway gated under Phase 4 as all the money had been identified by Councillors for gates in North Belfast.

LOCA, in co-operation with BCC, contacted Choice Housing, the owner of eight houses that back onto the alleyway, to request their financial support to cover the cost of the provision of the gates. The matter then passed to BCC and Choice Housing which requested detailed costings for the work from BCC some time during the first half of 2018.

BCC provided Choice with a quote for two



gates on 1st October 2018 but didn't hear back from it so it sent a reminder on 16th October 2018. Instead of pursuing Choice Housing further for a response, BCC took no further action. It explained this inaction by saying that it was unable to delay the Belfast wide consultation period any longer due to the need to get the gate order placed. However, this is inconsistent with the fact that BCC continued its consultation until mid-January 2019. This means that there had been three months during which BCC could have

contacted Choice Housing, but didn't. The BCC officer dealing with the issue told LOCA that, as BCC wasn't the scheme sponsor, it didn't feel the need to chase after Choice Housing for a response.

The Choice Housing officer dealing with the issue has acknowledged that it was a failure on Choice's part for not responding to the correspondence from BCC in October 2018. It contacted BCC in March 2019 to ask if the Oldpark Road gates scheme could still be included in the Belfast wide Phase 4 scheme. In its response, BCC introduced a new issue linked to problems of vehicular access to the alleyway. This issue had never been highlighted to LOCA previously. BCC also said that it appreciated there was an issue of anti-social behavior in the area and that it hoped to revisit the proposal in the future, should a Phase 5 Alleys Gating Scheme gain funding from the Council. It stated that this was likely to be 2020/21 at the earliest.

In the meantime, the people of Lower Oldpark have lost out.

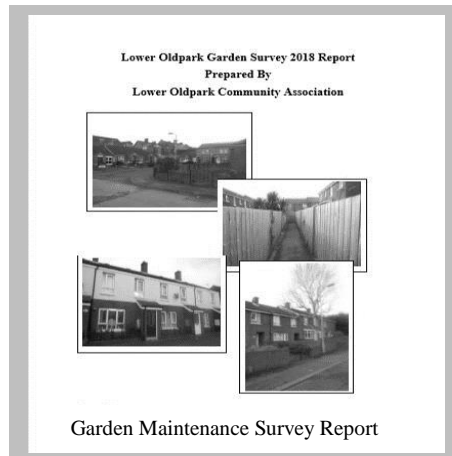
Lower Oldpark Garden Helpers Needed

A Lower Oldpark garden maintenance survey carried out between October and December 2018 has highlighted significant levels of need amongst local people.

In response to this need, Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) is preparing an action plan. One of the possible actions LOCA is looking at is the creation of a team of local Garden Helpers who could assist elderly and disabled people with basic garden jobs.

A lot of things would need to be sorted out before such a service might be made available. The first thing is to find out if there were enough local people who would be willing to become Garden Helpers.

If you think you have the physical fitness to do basic gardening work and are interested in



helping others, contact Gary Hughes at Lower Oldpark Community Centre, 9-23 Avoca Street or give him a call on 02890351334 or email loweroldparkhousing@gmail.com.

Lower Oldpark Bathroom/ Kitchen Scheme Planned

In the region of 136 Lower Oldpark, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) properties are expected to benefit from a planned bathroom and kitchen replacement scheme.

The improvement work will be carried out in two phases. It is hoped that Phase 1 will be able to begin towards the end of 2019 but a start date has not yet to be confirmed.

Tenants of scheme properties will be informed and consulted about it by the NIHE.

NIHE Office Change Update

In 2018, Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) requested the transfer of Housing Executive (NIHE) Area Office responsibility for the Lower Oldpark neighbourhood from Its North Belfast Area Office to its Shankill Office.

To date, the NIHE has not agreed to this. LOCA believes that a transfer would strengthen interest in Lower Oldpark as a place to live and, in doing so, support the process of regeneration. LOCA will continue to press for the transfer of Lower Oldpark responsibility to the NIHE Shankill Office.

Housing Advice Service

Help with housing problems is available from the Lower Oldpark Housing Project Worker:

Where: Lower Oldpark Community Centre, 9-23 Avoca Street.

Days: Monday to Friday.

Times: 8.30am – 11.30am and 1.0pm - 3.30pm.

Phone: 02890351334.