



HOUSING NEWS

Lower Oldpark

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

Future of Cliftonpark Avenue Site Still Uncertain

A cloud of uncertainty continues to hang over the future development of the green space site bounded by Cliftonpark Avenue, Crumlin Road and Landscape Terrace.

During April 2019, Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) carried out a survey of all households in the neighbourhood. Its purpose was to find out how people wanted to see the site developed. Residents were given two options and the majority of those who responded chose the second option. This would involve the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) transferring the site to Apex Housing for the development of ten, semi-detached, affordable houses. Thirty-six out of 50 respondents (72 percent) chose this option. However, in a recent development, the Housing Executive has informed LOCA that Apex Housing no longer wishes to be involved in the development of this site.

The first option on the survey form was selected by 14 out of 50 respondents (28 percent). This would involve the release, by the NIHE, of the site onto the open market with no specification of what should be developed on it. It was stated on the survey form that if this approach was followed it might lead to the development of five new private houses and a petrol station/ retail unit on the site but that it



Cliftonpark Avenue/ Crumlin Road/ Landscape Terrace development site

might also result in a developer obtaining the site and building whatever they can obtain planning permission for.

LOCA has advised the NIHE of its opposition to the release of the site on the open market unless there was a requirement placed on the successful bidder for the site to build only three-bedroom, 5-person family houses.

LOCA also found a provision within the NIHE's own land disposal rule book that would allow it to sell the land directly to the petrol station/ Spar owner instead of putting the site on the open market. LOCA

believes that this would be a good option because it would allow the development of a new petrol station and Euro-type Spar as well as ten private family homes. Planning approval for such a development is in place. The NIHE has informed LOCA that the Department of Finance's Land and Property Services section has said that a direct sale to the petrol station owner is not permitted. LOCA is seeking further information on this.

Lower Oldpark Bathroom/ Kitchen Scheme Update

In the region of 136 Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) properties in Lower Oldpark 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 yet to be confirmed.

Tenants of properties included in the scheme will be informed and consulted about it before any work starts.

Lower Oldpark Housing Website

<https://loweroldparkhousing.co.uk>

Lower Oldpark Housing Facebook Page

@loweroldparkhousing

Courts' Project – Start Date Remains Unclear

It remains unclear as to when work might start on the planned Courts' Project environmental improvement scheme in Lower Oldpark.

Planning approval for work to replace the shared surfaces at the front of the houses in seven residential courts is still awaited. The courts affected are Foyle, Shannon, (plus 1-11 Shannon Street), Bann, Liffey, Bandon, Manor and Southport.

Seven planning applications for the work were submitted by the scheme consultants Aecom in August 2018. This followed a delay of six months to the submission of the applications resulting from an error by the consultants. Almost one year after the applications were made, planning approval has not been obtained for work on any of the seven schemes.

LOCA understands that decisions on the seven planning applications were delayed by questions over possible land contamination and by issues raised by the Department for Infrastructure (Roads). It also understands that these issues have now been satisfactorily addressed and that planning approval may be obtained in the near future.



If planning approval is obtained, the NIHE will carry out a process to extinguish any rights over the land affected by the planned work. The extinguishment process is expected to take at least four months.

The threat of the Courts' Project not going ahead was reduced when approval was given earlier in the year for the Department for Communities (DfC) budget which includes funding for the Lower Oldpark Courts' Project. It was also reduced by the DfC internal approval of the business case for the scheme.

In December 2016, the Lower Oldpark Building Successful Communities Forum agreed that the Courts' Project would be one of three 'Catalyst' projects that would happen in Lower Oldpark. The original proposal had been for street improvement work in Cliftonpark Avenue, however, Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) had pushed for the Courts' Project scheme instead. During 2017, scheme plans were prepared and consultation with the community was carried out.

Social Housing Scheme Planning



An architect appointed by Clanmil Housing is working on plans for twelve new social houses to be built in the Lower Oldpark neighbourhood.

The new homes will be built on the open

green land fronting onto Manor Street, Alloa Street and on the former Annalee Court. The scheme will involve the development of eight 3 bedroom houses and four 2 bedroom houses.

In early July 2019, Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) provided Clanmil and its architect with feedback on outline sketches of how the new development might look. The architect is currently working on more detailed draft plans. Once these are complete, a community consultation will be held for all Lower Oldpark residents.

When final plans have been agreed with the community, a planning application will be submitted to Belfast City Council Planning Department by Clanmil. It is hoped that this will be in September 2019. It is unclear how long it will take for planning permission to be obtained.

On completion of building work, the new homes will be let to applicants on the social housing waiting list.

Building Successful Communities Initiative Has Failed

Since 2016, there have been many delays to Lower Oldpark's various regeneration schemes.

These have been a great source of disappointment and frustration for the people of Lower Oldpark. They also reinforce the strong feeling within Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) that the Department for Communities' 'Building Successful Communities' (BSC) initiative in Lower Oldpark has been a failure. This feeling comes from the knowledge that nothing of significance, from a housing perspective, has happened in Lower Oldpark as a result of the BSC initiative within its first five years.

The Department for Communities (DfC) website says that the 'The Building Successful Communities' initiative was introduced as part of the Facing the Future - Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland in 2013 and aims to use housing intervention

as one of the main catalysts for local regeneration.' LOCA understands that this can involve more than just the building of new homes. However, LOCA believes that it reflects very badly on the Government's BSC initiative when it is highlighted that, in Lower Oldpark, not one brick of one new house has been laid as a result of the BSC initiative since it began in 2014.

Things always happen during regeneration processes that cause delays. This is inevitable. However, in Lower Oldpark, from 2016 to the present, the extent of the delays has been shocking.

LOCA has, for some time, been highlighting and complaining about the many hold-ups but there is no evidence that this has made a difference. LOCA will continue to attend the meetings with Government and other bodies and push for faster progress but with little faith that it will make a difference.



LOCA does not have any direct control over how the various Lower Oldpark regeneration schemes are managed. This is the role of Government and public and other bodies. However, LOCA does have the ability to identify the reasons for the many delays to regeneration in Lower Oldpark. This process has started and will continue. Lessons need to be learnt from what has happened in Lower Oldpark. Not just for the benefit of Lower Oldpark but also for other neighbourhoods that face similar problems and obstacles.

Affordable Housing Development Decision Still Awaited



Site for proposed new affordable houses

A final decision on whether an affordable housing scheme by Apex Housing at the junction of Cliftonpark Avenue and

Oldpark Road can go ahead is still awaited.

The proposed scheme on the green space site involves the development of five affordable, owner-occupier houses.

On 10th May 2019, LOCA was advised that a process to decide whether Housing Development Grant can be paid by the Department for Communities (DfC) will take at least six months. The purpose of the Grant is to reduce the cost of building the houses, therefore making them more affordable.

These delays follow a second tender

process in early 2019 for the appointment of a contractor to build the houses. An initial tender process during the summer of 2018 didn't result in a building contractor being appointed.

Planning approval for the development of the five houses was granted in November 2017.

If the DfC and Department of Finance approve Housing Development Grant for the scheme, it will probably be early 2020 before work can begin. If these government departments don't approve the Grant, it seems likely that the scheme will be abandoned.

Redecoration Work Planned For Radius Flats

Four blocks of Radius Housing flats in Lower Oldpark are expected to benefit from redecoration work to their communal areas.

The work is expected to start during the latter part of 2019 or the early part of 2020

and will include repainting, replacement of floor finishes and cleaning/ replacement of rainwater gutters at blocks - 1-7 Avoca Street, 35-41 Avoca Street, 51-53 Avoca Street and 52-62 Cliftonpark Avenue.

Radius Housing advises that its Asset

Officer will be in contact with the tenants in the four blocks in advance to provide details on when a site survey will take place and to give further information.

Change of Plan for Cliftonpark Avenue Site

Plans for the possible development of part of the site running between 62 Cliftonpark Avenue and Alloa Street have changed.

In February 2019, Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) consulted residents about how the piece of land beside 62 Cliftonpark Avenue could be developed.

Following the consultation process, consultants Paul Hogarth Co prepared outline plans showing how new community facilities could be developed on the site. These plans included new community accommodation in the form of refurbished shipping containers and an outdoor play space for young children.



In April 2019, LOCA decided to look at other possible sites for the new facilities. Discussions about this are ongoing.

LOCA then told the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) that it wanted

housing developed on the whole site. The NIHE is currently working with LOCA on this.

The situation is complicated by two things. Firstly, Radius Housing owns a small section of the site beside 62 Cliftonpark Avenue and its support is needed before that part of the site could be developed.

Secondly, a small part of the site at the Cliftonpark Avenue/ Alloa Street junction is privately owned and was advertised for sale earlier this year. LOCA understands that this site is currently under offer.

New Amended Planning Application for Crumlin Road Site



An amended planning application for a five storey development of 14 apartments on the site 205 to 211 Crumlin Road was submitted to Belfast City Council (BCC) Planning Department by GAD Developments of Tandragee on 6th March 2019.

In 2017, the company submitted a planning application for a five storey development of 18 apartments and two retail units on the same site. A similar application followed in 2018.

Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) has made residents in local streets aware of the planning applications and provided them with opportunities to submit comments on the plans to BCC Planning Department. LOCA also submitted its own objection to the original planning application.

During the summer of 2018, LOCA wrote to the GAD Developments requesting a meeting to discuss community concerns about the development and future management of the apartment block. GAD Developments ignored these letters.

No Significant Actions After Meeting

A meeting involving the most senior Department for Communities (DfC) civil servant, the Permanent Secretary, and attended by a Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) representative, resulted in no significant actions.

The meeting on 3rd July 2019 was requested by DUP Leader, Arlene Foster, after hearing LOCA concerns about the Lower Oldpark regeneration process during a visit to the area in April 2019.

After the meeting, the Permanent Secretary provided LOCA with a copy of an update email between DfC officers. It said that 'there were no significant actions resulting from the meeting aside from Permanent Secretary to visit which she was happy to accept.'

It also summarised the issues raised by LOCA and stated that the Permanent Secretary had recognised that delays had occurred which she viewed as outside the control of the DfC Building Successful Communities team. She also offered assurance that the team was fully committed to the initiative and was progressing the schemes as quickly as possible given the complicated nature of the capital projects. She also advised that it was hoped to make significant progress by year end and that the team would keep LOCA regularly updated.

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.

Keep Lower Oldpark Clean

Illegal dumping of household items and rubbish on open space and walkways in Lower Oldpark is a problem.

It poses a danger to young children and pets and makes the area look bad.

Belfast City Council will remove some household items from your home at no cost to you. Ring the Council's Bulky Waste Collection service on 028 90270230 to find out more.