



HOUSING NEWS

Lower Oldpark

September 2022. Lower Oldpark Community Association, 9-23 Avoca Street, Belfast BT14 6EN. Tel: 028 96928293. Email: loweroldparkhousing@gmail.com

Lower Oldpark Social Housing Scheme Progress

The start of building work on twelve new social houses in Lower Oldpark is moving closer.

The scheme developer, Clanmil Housing, has told Lower Oldpark Community Association that it is waiting for Northern Ireland Water to agree final arrangements for dealing with the disposal of sewage from the new homes. This issue has been the cause of major delay to progress.

The development involves the building of ten houses and two bungalows on the grassed area that

runs along Manor Street, down Alloa Street and along the former Annalee Court.

Planning approval was given by Belfast City Council (BCC) Planning Committee on 18th January 2022. The planning application process will be complete when Clanmil receives the 'Green Form' from BCC Planning Department. Clanmil advises that this is imminent.

Sale of the land by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to Clanmil still has to be completed.



Hopefully, this won't take too long. A contractor for the building work has already been appointed.

No start date for the building work has been provided yet but, all being well, the very long wait of the people of Lower Oldpark will soon be over.

Mutual Exchanges – An Alternative To Transfers

Secure tenants of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and housing associations have the right to swap their homes with another tenant of a NIHE or housing association property. Tenants may find this useful if they, e.g.

- Need a smaller or larger home.
- Want to move to a different area.
- Don't want to wait for a transfer.

It is necessary to get the permission of your social housing landlord before you can exchange your home.

Tenants may not be able to exchange if they:

- Have rent arrears.
- Want to move to a property that is smaller or larger than they need.
- Live in a property that has been adapted or is part of a sheltered scheme and the new tenant has no need for such accommodation.
- Have carried out improvements/

alterations without landlord consent.

- Live in a property that is subject to a court order for possession.

Tenants can arrange a swap as follows:

- Register online with HomeSwapper <https://www.homeswapper.co.uk/>
- Ask their landlord to carry out an electronic search for properties to swap with.
- By word of mouth.
- Advertising in newspapers.
- Online e.g. social media.
- Postcard in shop windows.

If a tenant finds a suitable home to swap, they should register for an exchange with their social housing landlord. They must complete and submit a transfer application form. Search online for NIHE Transfer Application form which covers NIHE and housing association tenants. Forms are also available from the NIHE Patch Manager and housing association local housing officers.

Managing Money Help for NIHE Tenants

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) is offering its tenants the chance to become more confident in managing their finances through its 'Making Your Money Work' service.

NIHE Financial Inclusion Managers are available to offer impartial advice to its tenants so that they can make the decisions that will help them become better off.

They can do a free benefits' check, help with making a budget and provide tips with making the most out of household income.

To make a telephone appointment with one of the NIHE Financial Inclusion Managers, you can call 03448 920 900.

You can also go through the NIHE Patch Manager for Lower Oldpark, Andrea McAleenan or the Lower Oldpark Community Association Housing Project Worker, Gary Hughes.

New Lower Oldpark NIHE Patch Manager

Lower Oldpark has a new Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) Patch Manager.

In May 2022, Andrea McAleenan took over the job from Martin McClure who had been in the role from 2019.

NIHE Patch Managers provide tenancy and estate management services to NIHE tenants and the communities in which they live.

Patch Managers are a single point of contact in a specific geographical patch e.g. Lower Oldpark. For tenants, they deal with things like:

- New tenancy sign-up.

- Transfer and mutual exchange applications.
- Rent account matters.
- Planned maintenance schemes.
- Payments from the NIHE.
- Tenancy succession and assignment, and joint tenancies.
- Anti-social behaviour and community safety issues.
- Managing empty NIHE homes.

If you would like to contact the NIHE Lower Oldpark Patch Manager, Andrea McAleenan, you can ring her on 028 95982749 or mobile 0781 8427225.

LOCA Seeks Confirmation On Courts Maintenance

Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) continues to work to get a full picture of maintenance responsibility for the newly created street layout in seven Lower Oldpark housing courts.

The Lower Oldpark Courts' Project, which was completed during early 2022, involved the creation of new shared pedestrian/ vehicle surfaces and, in some cases, new pedestrian walkways.

The project involved an investment of £1.7M by the Department for Communities (DfC) under the Building Successful Communities initiative.

The new court layouts mean that cleaning and maintenance responsibility in different parts of the courts have also changed.

DfC has provided LOCA with copies of updated plans showing which parts the Department for Infrastructure is responsible for after adoption (hopefully within about three months) and which parts the Housing Executive is responsible for. LOCA will make these plans available to residents after adoption has taken place.

On 19th August 2022, LOCA met with representatives from DfC, Department for Infrastructure, the Housing Executive and Belfast City Council. The meeting was helpful but it highlighted that there are still issues that needed to be sorted out. LOCA will keep residents updated when it has more information.

Cliftonpark Avenue Private Homes Nearing Completion

Work on six new private homes in Cliftonpark Avenue nears completion.

Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) understands that the three-bedroom townhouses are expected to be finished during September, subject to the Department for Infrastructure completing work at the front of the houses in Cliftonpark Avenue.

The six houses are part of a mixed-use development which includes a new petrol station and Spar shop along with ten houses for sale, including four on the site of the old petrol station. The mixed-use scheme was planned and taken forward by Landscape Enterprises which developed the petrol station and the Spar shop. However, development of the six houses was taken forward by Lorcan Homes.

LOCA had requested a meeting with Lorcan Homes to discuss how the six homes could receive additional marketing across Lower Oldpark and the rest of the Greater Shankill.

Unfortunately, by the time a meeting took place on 20th July 2022, five of the six houses had been agreed for sale. All



Cliftonpark Avenue private houses

but one house has now been sold.

LOCA welcomes the sale of new private homes in the area. However, it has expressed its disappointment to Landscape Enterprises and Lorcan Homes that an opportunity had not been taken to give Lower Oldpark and other Greater Shankill people an increased chance of buying a home in their area.

Housing Advice Service

Help with housing problems is available from the Lower Oldpark Housing Project Worker, Gary Hughes.

Days: Monday to Friday.

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

Phone: 028 96928293 or 028 90351334.

Find Out More At

Website

<https://loweroldparkhousing.co.uk>

Facebook: @loweroldparkhousing

Help When Things Get A Bit Difficult

Sometimes, there are problems in our lives that may make it difficult for us to remain living independently in our home.

This situation can occur if we are tenants or if we own, or are buying, our home.

The good news is that help is at hand through Floating Support Services for those who may be in this situation

Short-term Floating Support, which is part of the Supporting People Programme, is funded by the Department for Communities and is administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

A number of organisations receive funding to provide support to new and existing tenants, people in temporary accommodation and homeowners. The aim is to help people to live independently in their home.

The assistance is provided by a support worker who helps to find solutions to the specific problems faced by the person in need. Help can be provided for up to two years.

Areas of support can include:

- Advice on housing rights and responsibilities.
- Claiming welfare benefits, paying bills and debts.
- Budgeting and financial management.
- Setting up home and resettlement support.
- Understanding tenancy agreements.
- Life skills and being independent at home.
- Staying safe at home.
- Accessing daytime activities, training, education and employment within the community.
- Finding a doctor and accessing other necessary services.
- Dealing with different agencies.
- Emotional health issues.
- People experiencing homelessness with support needs.
- Older people with support needs.
- Travelers.
- People with a physical or sensory disability.
- Women at risk of domestic abuse.
- People with alcohol problems.
- Young people (including young mothers).
- Refugees.

Organisations providing support include those providing help for:

- Frail elderly people.
- People with drug problems.
- Families experiencing homelessness.
- People with learning disabilities.
- People with convictions or people at risk of offending.
- People with mental health problems.
- People with a diagnosis of dementia.

If you, or someone you know, may be in need of housing support, you can:

- Ask the NIHE Patch Manager for Lower Oldpark (Andrea McAleenan – phone 028 9598 2749 or mobile 07818427225) or the housing officer for your area if you are a housing association tenant.
- Ask your social worker or health professional.
- Contact a housing support service provider directly. There is an online directory available at <http://www.nihe.gov.uk/find-support>.
- The Lower Oldpark Community Association Housing Project Worker, Gary Hughes, can assist you to find help. Phone Gary on 028 96928293 or 0771 3990976 or email loweroldparkhousing@gmail.com.

Gardening Equipment Available to Borrow At No Cost

Lower Oldpark residents can make use of a no cost gardening equipment lending service this summer.

The service, which is provided by Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA), allows householders to borrow gardening equipment for up to two days.

It is only available to Lower Oldpark households that don't have access to gardening equipment and who can

use the equipment they borrow from LOCA or have someone to do the work for them using the borrowed equipment.

For more information, contact Gary Hughes at LOCA on 028 96928293 or 029 90351334 or 0771 3990976 or email loweroldparkhousing@gmail.com

Limited supplies of equipment may mean having to join a waiting list.



Gardening equipment for loan

Lower Oldpark Weed Spraying Date Still Unknown

The start date for weed spraying in Lower Oldpark streets during 2022 still isn't known despite Lower Oldpark Community Association's (LOCA) efforts to find it out.

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is responsible for weed control which is delivered through a programme of weed spraying.

On 19th May 2022, LOCA emailed DfI and asked when spraying will be carried out in Lower Oldpark.

DfI replied saying that it had instructed its external contractor to begin the cyclical of weed control work for 2022 but that a programme hadn't yet been received from the contractor to confirm dates.

In response, LOCA asked that it received the Lower Oldpark spraying start date when DfI received the programme from its contractor. A DfI representative called with LOCA on 13th June 2022 but was unable to provide a start date.

On 15th July 2022, LOCA became aware of a 4th July 2022 article on the BelfastLive news website on the topic of weed spraying in South Belfast in response to concerns raised by a South Belfast councillor.

In the article, a spokesperson for the DfI is quoted as saying, 'The weed control programme in Belfast is underway and plans for South Belfast are finalised'.

LOCA emailed DfI again on 19th July requesting the information but has not received details of the weed spraying start date.

LOCA also had major difficulties during 2021 when it requested the same information about weed

spraying in Lower Oldpark for the 2021 season. DfI didn't provide the information so LOCA was forced to raise the matter with the Northern Ireland Assembly Infrastructure Committee which, in turn, raised it with the Minister.

Arising from the Committee's intervention, the Minister advised that weed spraying in Belfast was delayed because of a contractual dispute but that it was resolved by way of a mediation process which allowed weed treatment in Greater Belfast to commence on 17th July 2021.

Following a request from the Infrastructure Committee, a LOCA representative took part in an online discussion event with Infrastructure Committee MLA's on 9th February 2022.

Following this event, the Committee received a response from the Minister which said:

'Officials have confirmed that, if asked by Lower Oldpark Community Association for information on when weed spraying will be carried out in Lower Oldpark (as specified in the work programme), they will provide the relevant information in a reasonable timescale and in accordance with my departments obligations under the Environmental Information Regulations.

It is worth noting that the programme start date may be subject to change at short notice as effective use of the chemicals used is largely dependent on dry weather conditions.'

Despite the assurance from the former Minister, LOCA still awaits a response to its request to DfI officers on 19th May 2022.



Lower Oldpark Alley Gate Installation

Work on a programme of alley gate installation at various locations across Lower Oldpark is under way.

The first batch of new metal gates has been put in place by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in Fairfax, Rosewood and Hillview courts. These replaced old and decaying wooden gates and fencing.

Lower Oldpark Community Association understands that the NIHE, Belfast City Council and the Department for Infrastructure are working together on the provision of gates, where permitted, throughout the rest of the neighbourhood.

LOCA awaits information on where gates will be provided and when they will be installed.

Improvements to Planted Areas Welcomed

Lower Oldpark Community Association has welcomed improvements to three Radius Housing owned planted areas at the rear of 52 - 62 Cliftonpark Avenue.

Provision of new flowers, bushes and bark ground cover has helped to tidy up these bits of land that had been neglected for years.