

Queens Parade Deadlock



It is understood that the Councils Planning Committee is to meet on Tuesday the 18th of January to discuss the proposed Reservoir Safety legislation. Their objective is to deliver a response to the Department of Infrastructure's consultation process.

The meeting will take place just three working days before the end of the consultation process allowing no time for the committee to bring their response to a full council meeting. They have however been given the authority to deliver their response to the DFI on behalf of the entire council.

There are a number of questions that arise from this briefing.

- 1. Why did they leave their engagement with the consultation process until the eleventh hour?**
- 2. The Clondeboy lake issue was raised many months ago. Did any of our elected representatives, either individually or collectively directly engage with the DFI Minister or the DFC Minister (who is the project lead) to petition against “worst case scenario” modelling?**
- 3. What is the objective of this meeting and how do the committee members envisage their response (to the consultation exercise) will break the current deadlock?**
- 4. If the Reservoir Safety Legislation does not currently apply to Northern Ireland why do the planners not operate solely within the boundaries of current NI legislation?**

Responsibility

There is also the issue of our locally elected representatives (at all levels) not taking any responsibility for the failures thus far.

Local social media pages repeatedly see councillors shift their responsibility and blame to the Department for Communities. The fact is, the Council are project partners with the DFC and the developers “Bangor Marine” so it is incumbent on them, particularly as the local authority to use their power and influence to best effect. Meanwhile the lack of progress would suggest that they have been sitting on their hands.

Communication

As already mentioned, the Queens Parade project is a joint enterprise but where our local Council should be taking the lead is in communication, as they are closest to the people most invested in the scheme. But, yet again the Councils performance has been shockingly poor.

We (the public) have two main go-to platforms for information. There is the DFC webpage which is: -

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/regeneration-queens-parade-bangor>

or the Councils page: -

<https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/business/bangor-regeneration/queens-parade>

Please note the contradictory statements:

DFC Page: -

*“A number of properties were acquired through a Vesting Order in January 2017, which **completed** the Departments acquisition of **all** the required land and property to take forward the scheme.”*

Council Page:

*The Queen’s Parade area of Bangor has been largely derelict for almost 20 years and its regeneration has been a priority for the Department for Communities, which owns **most** of the site.*

And: -

*“Council awaits DfI Planning’s determination, and in the meantime continues to work alongside the developer, Bangor Marine, and the Department for Communities, who **currently own the majority of the site**, to progress the scheme.”*

So, what is the current state of affairs, do the DFC own all the required land and property?

Oversight & Governance

I refer again to the DFC webpage.

It states that: -

*“**A Project Board**, comprising representatives from the Department, Ards & North Down Borough Council, Strategic Investment Board, Land & Property Services and the developer, **has been established** to oversee the governance and delivery of the Development Scheme, ensuring compliance with the conditions and timescales set within the Development Agreement.*

This Board will meet regularly throughout the duration of the project.”

- 1. How many times has the project board met thus far?**
- 2. When did the Project Board last convene?**

The DFC Page also states: -

*“Work is ongoing between the Department for Communities, the Ards and North Down Borough Council, and the developer, Bangor Marine, to develop a joint communications and stakeholder engagement plan, to inform the local community of progress as we enter the next phases of the Queen’s Parade Development. Part of this work involves Bangor Marine **developing a website where updates will be publicised.**”*

- 1. Has the joint communications and stakeholder engagement plan been established?**
- 2. How many times has joint communications and stakeholder engagement plan met thus far?**
- 3. When did the joint communications and stakeholder engagement plan last convene?**
- 4. When will the aforementioned website be accessible?**

DFC Acquired Property Currently “To Let”



Figure 48 – Existing buildings to be demolished on Main Street

The former B&M Bargains is an integral part of the regeneration scheme which is earmarked for completion by 2025.

- 1. Why do the DFC have this building on the market “To Let” given that it is due for demolition?**

There are many more questions requiring answers but it would be greatly appreciated if our local Councillors in particular, and/or our MLA's/Ministers would care to furnish their electorate with answers to the above as a start to a new and more transparent engagement with those they claim to represent.