DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM SHAINCHEISTEANNA RÍTHÁBHACHTACHA A THÉANN I GCION AR AN LUCHT SIÚIL

JOINT COMMITTEE ON KEY ISSUES AFFECTING THE TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

Déardaoin, 21 Bealtaine 2026

Thursday, 21 May 2026

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 12.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 12.30 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	**Seanadóirí / Senators**
John Connolly,	Maria Byrne,
Dessie Ellis,	Eileen Flynn,
Séamus McGrath,	Malcolm Noonan,
Naoise Ó Muirí,	Joe O'Reilly,
Maurice Quinlivan.	Anne Rabbitte.

Teachta / Deputy George Lawlor sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

The joint committee met at 12.40 p.m. in private session, suspended at 12.49 p.m. and commenced in public session at 12.51 p.m.

Traveller Accommodation: Discussion (Resumed)

An Cathaoirleach: No apologies have been received. This meeting is to discuss the issue of Traveller accommodation and in particular the redevelopment of Labre Park in Ballyfermot. Our witnesses are from the Ballyfermot Travellers Action Project, BTAP. They are Mr. Shay L'Estrange, co-ordinator, and Ms Breda Berry, board member. They are both very welcome to the committee.

I ask anyone attending remotely - Senator Byrne is our only remote attender - to mute their microphones if they are not contributing, so we do not pick up any background noise or feedback. As usual, I remind all those in attendance to ensure that mobile phones are on silent or switched off. Members attending remotely are reminded of the constitutional requirements that in order to participate in public meetings, they must be physically present within the confines of the Leinster House complex.

As the witnesses are within the precincts of Leinster House, they are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the presentations they make to the committee. This means they have an absolute defence against any defamation action for anything they say at the meeting. However, they are expected not to abuse this privilege and it is my duty as Cathaoirleach to ensure this privilege is not abused. Therefore, if their statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative that they comply with any such direction.

Members are also reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or entity outside of the Houses, or an official of the Houses, either by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

I invite Mr. L'Estrange to make his opening statement. We will then proceed with questions and answers.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: I thank members of the committee for their invitation to address them regarding issues affecting the Traveller community, especially in relation to the cancelled regeneration of Labre Park.

To put the Labre Park halting site into context, it was built in 1967 in response to the Government's Report of the Commission on Itinerancy. The report's primary goal was the assimilation of the Traveller community into a settled lifestyle. While it called for local authorities to provide accommodation, it specifically stated that this was to serve as a staging post prior to moving the Traveller community into settled housing. Because of this assimilation policy, the site selected for Labre Park was a location that had previously been used as an unofficial dump. Surrounded by an industrial estate, it was located on the edge of Ballyfermot in an area already suffering from high levels of disadvantage. Dublin City Council, DCC, has never viewed the site as a permanent one. Consequently, it has evolved in an *ad hoc* fashion resulting in poor infrastructure. Clúid Housing, appointed in 2016 to lead the regeneration, noted in their business case that the existing housing was of "poor build quality." It also highlighted that room sizes were below regulation standards and required significant upgrades to meet modern requirements. A copy of the Clúid report has been supplied to the committee.

Years of poor and *ad hoc* infrastructure development have caused serious health issues for the community, notably a 2020 outbreak of hepatitis A, a disease typically associated with developing nations rather than a developed European country. To address these issues, a regeneration of Labre Park has been campaigned for over 30 years and was included in DCC's six Traveller accommodation plans over 25 years. Throughout this quarter century, numerous plans were developed, only to be cancelled due to obstacles raised by DCC or, on one occasion, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. At no stage over these 25 years and six different plans did the Traveller community cause any of these projects to collapse.

In 2018, the most extensive plan to date was designed and agreed upon after consultation with the community. This included 28 new homes, a cultural-community centre and the refurbishment of 21 existing homes. In 2020, this plan collapsed due to a questionable objection from within DCC. It was replaced in 2023 by a plan that reduced the number of new homes by 65% down to just ten homes. Despite this reduction, the community remained committed to the project. However, this project also collapsed when the Department of housing refused to fund necessary flood alleviation measures that would allow it to go ahead.

This brings us to the most recent plan developed in 2025. To avoid previous pitfalls, it was distributed by DCC to all its departments for approval in late 2025, which it received. This allowed DCC to submit the plan to the Department for funding. For unexplained reasons, the DCC engineering and drainage department withdrew its support at the last minute, following on from the submission being made to the Department. This decision has left the community devastated. While DCC describes this as a "pause", the community views it as the final nail in the coffin of the Labre Park project.

Another concern is the loss of the full upgrade for existing homes, which was also part of this regeneration. There were two key elements of the previous proposal. First, the redesign and extension of these homes to address their substandard room sizes and, second, because the site was built on an unofficial dump, Clúid proposed installing a membrane in the floors of existing homes to eliminate the risk of landfill gases leaking into these homes. The latest proposal from DCC fails to address either the substandard build quality or the potential for gases to leak up through these homes. This means families are not only being left in substandard housing but in a potentially dangerous environment. Additionally, the much-needed community-cultural centre has also been shelved.

In light of the fact that DCC has reneged on this plan and all other plans that have been put forward, and the community has not been compromised on them, the residents of Labre Park are demanding a full regeneration be carried out as agreed in 2020, which includes the building of 28 homes and not going back to the ten homes. We want the full thing done now. There have been too many occasions where the community has been let down and they are demanding we get a full regeneration now.

Ms Berry, chair of BTAP, is also here and is a resident of Labre Park. Could she be given the opportunity to briefly describe what the lived experience is like in Labre Park?

An Cathaoirleach: Absolutely.

Ms Breda Berry: In 1995 I had two children. I was waiting to be housed. I went on to have eight children, and now have 15 grandchildren, but I am still waiting with no units for accommodation made. However, I can see the whole area around me where I am living being

built up. At the moment, there is going to be 5,000 apartments built in the Dublin 10 and Dublin 12 area around the Kylemore Road, yet not one brick has been laid or a sod of turf turned in Labre Park. The conditions are getting worse week by week and day by day. There is nothing changing.

People feel so let down after all these years. They are actually suffering in the conditions they are living in. Under false promises, we were there so many times with the Part 8. Everything was ready to go. It was like a spanner was thrown in the works. Now it has come to the stage that it is not the spanner anymore; it is the whole toolbox. Things are getting worse and worse. The population is getting bigger. There are new couples getting married and going on to have their own families. As was said, we wanted ten units of accommodation but we are now calling for the whole 26.

Senator Eileen Flynn: I thank Ballyfermot Travellers Action Project and its board of management for being here this afternoon. I was born and reared in Labre Park and I was the chairperson of Ballyfermot Travellers Action Project. It was my first proper role. I listened to Mr. L'Estrange talking about the regeneration. We got the go-ahead in 2020. Previous to that we got a go-ahead in 2017. I am 36 years of age.

Since I was a child, as regards housing, we have been speaking about the redevelopment of the Labre Park site. This is a question for Ms Berry and Mr. L'Estrange because I have not been a resident full-time on the site for nine years but, as they know, I stay there a lot of the time still. Do they believe that the council is trying to push out residents of Labre Park? I know for a fact there are many residents on the site who were born and reared on it and are now living in worse accommodation, in settled accommodation. Do Ms Berry and Mr. L'Estrange believe that the local authority, which has the responsibility to care for the people on the site, is looking just to push people out and then there will be no Labre Park in the next five to ten years? I would love their honest opinion on that. That is my opinion, and I believe it is the case not only for Labre Park but also for St. Margaret's, Dunsink Lane, St. Joseph's and the other halting sites. I had a young woman on a placement with me a few weeks ago and she said to me, "I believe they are going to just get rid of halting sites." That is the last bit of Traveller culture we have. I know in Labre Park they cleaned up the end of the site and put in good work. What do Ms Berry and Mr. L'Estrange believe is stopping the redevelopment? I could sit here all day and talk about how we were here one time and now we have started from scratch. Ms Berry said it: people have been thrown under the bus and are so hopeless and disheartened. What do Ms Berry and Mr. L'Estrange think is really going on, and how can we as a committee support the residents of Labre Park?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: I will take it back a little. I started in BTAP in 2019 as a naive and enthusiastic 57- or 58-year-old and I believed that Dublin City Council wanted to do the regeneration of Labre Park. That was my honest belief at that stage, despite the evidence to the contrary for 20 years previous to that, during which there had been letdown after letdown. I engaged with the community, with Ms Berry and her sister Tina, who is in the Gallery, and with other people. We engaged and we set up a committee. Every so often the community would come in and say, "You know, you are being a little stupid here." It was in a very nice way; they were not being insulting towards me. They would say, "We do not get anything. This does not happen for us." That went on for a number of years, and during that time we had two collapses of the regeneration. I probably foolishly went back in again and engaged with

the community and tried to convince people that it was worth sticking with, that we would get there and that we would get something out of this. I had to go back. I got a call on, I think, 4 April from Dublin City Council telling me it had gone again. It was the Thursday before the long weekend of Easter and it would have given enough time for the anger, if it had been there, to dissipate. There was no anger there. I went in on the Wednesday after that and met with the community - Ms Berry and others were there - and the community said, "We told you so; we told you seven years ago that it was not going to happen." That was the reality.

Is it assimilation? Yes, it is assimilation. It cannot be denied any more, in my opinion. A lot of people would have told me for a long time that it was assimilation. Friends of mine from the Traveller community, before I came into the job, told me it was assimilation. It is assimilation. It cannot be denied. We have 5,000 apartments proposed for a site 5 m or 6 m away from Labre Park that is going ahead in the Kylemore plan, and we cannot get ten houses built in Labre Park, as I said, 5 m or 10 m of crossroad. What does that say to people? It is obvious. There is no question any more but that this is assimilation, and it goes back to 1963, as I said in my opening remarks.

Sorry, I missed Senator Flynn's second question. What was it?

Senator Eileen Flynn: Does Mr. L'Estrange believe the council is just going to destroy Labre Park and-----

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: I think the ultimate aim, and it is the ultimate aim of-----

Senator Eileen Flynn: I have another really important question for Mr. L'Estrange. Every vision of the plans we have had over the past 24 years has included a community centre. Ms Berry, Ms Tina Berry, Michelle and I know the importance of having a community centre on the site of Labre Park. Does Mr. L'Estrange believe that will happen if the redevelopment goes ahead? Let us just be real on the committee. That is what I want - to be very real. Dublin City Council, I believe, has a plan to just get rid of Labre Park.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: We had a plan, and Niall Crowley was appointed as the chair of the regeneration committee of Labre Park. Sitting with Niall Crowley and the community, we came up with a plan, not for a community centre but for a cultural-community centre. The idea we drew on was the fact that not everybody can come back into Labre Park. If everyone who was born in Labre Park and formed new relationships and developed new families wanted to come back, we would need a site ten times the size of Labre Park. Most of those people are living in settled accommodation in the wider community. Our idea was that this would be a hub. It would be a place where people did not have to stay in Labre Park to retain their culture. They could live in the wider area and come back into Labre Park and engage with their culture in the cultural-community centre. It was a novel idea. We thought it was a very strong idea. Unfortunately, that is gone as well now. That is not going to happen. As we understand it, we were told by Dublin City Council at the last LTACC meeting what its plan was going forward for Labre Park, seeing as the houses are not getting built, and it was not mentioned that the community centre would be part of it at all. I have described the other two issues, which are very serious as well.

Senator Eileen Flynn: Does Ms Berry have anything she wishes to say? I have a few seconds left. What does she think? Does she think there is a way forward? After this meeting,

after being heard, what would she like to see, as a resident, that she had already hoped for from Dublin City Council?

Ms Breda Berry: I hope it is not just put on the table today and then just put in a cupboard and locked away, gathering dust. I hope people take it seriously and really look into what can be done to resolve the issues that are arising. What is actually stopping this plan going ahead? I would like to see that finalised for once and for all. At this stage it would be like a miracle happening. As I said, this happened six times. Whatever about once or twice, six times is an awful lot of times for something like this to happen.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: I thank the witnesses for being with us. Going back to the 1963 report on itinerancy and assimilation, some of the members were in Dunsink Lane last week. I see this in my community in Kilkenny, where there is housing pressure coming in on a group scheme that was supposed to be a temporary halting site but it has been there 35 years now and, similarly, on other sites across the country. Do the witnesses think perhaps that the reason the council keeps stop-starting plans is that it wants the site completely gone in order to develop housing, that the site is really in the way of a bigger development?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: I do not think many people could argue with that analysis because we can see with the apartment blocks going up around Labre Park that it is situated on a crossroads on the canal. Two corners of the crossroads have had apartments built on them, the third corner has 5,000 apartments proposed for it, and this is the only corner left now and it is wedged between a dump, which is Thorntons Recycling, some very dirty commercial stuff and the main road there. It is the last piece, I imagine, and the community has told me this for a long time. This is a valuable piece of land and it would be really nice for these people to be getting in and getting their apartments built on this piece of land. If the Senator wants, I can give him the community's views. Without a shadow of a doubt, Dublin City Council would love to have this as a piece of real estate that it could turn into apartments. I agree with the community's analysis of that.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: The ask, 28 houses and a community centre, does not seem too significant. Given the money that is in the Department of housing at the moment and the Minister pretty much saying that money is not an issue for housing generally, does Mr. L'Estrange have any confidence that it will get over the line this time?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: Not if it is left to Dublin City Council on its own. I have no doubt in my mind that it will not happen in any shape or form. It will take pressure from the Government or pressure from the likes of this committee being brought to bear on Dublin City Council if it is to happen. If left to its own will, I have no doubt in my mind it will never happen.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: The landfill was never capped, was it? It was never remediated properly, so the houses were built on a landfill. Is that correct? I could not get a picture of it.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: Yes. The houses were built on an unofficial dump. The Senator will see from the report that Clúid did this and that.

We always suspected that was the case but Clúid confirmed it when it did an analysis of the soil and was able to pre-date the dump to before 1967. Clúid said it is a problem that it was built on a dump but we can alleviate those problems by putting a membrane into the existing homes and all of the new homes that were to be built, and a vent pipe in each back garden to

allow the gases to escape through that vent pipe. When I asked Dublin City Council at the last local Traveller accommodation consultative committee, LTACC, meeting what it was going to do, it said that was not part of its proposal for the upgrade of the houses, or the upgrade that was supposed to happen as part of regeneration.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: Where are the checks and balances? Mr. L'Estrange is saying this appeared in six Traveller action plans, TAPs, which would have been tied into the development plan as well.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: Yes.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: Where is the accountability here, that we are able to get through six TAPs and there is still no commencement of housing?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: I think there is nothing restricting any local authority writing anything they want into a TAP and there is no accountability when those TAPs fail. Each TAP has failed, one after the other, for six TAPS. Every one of them has failed and the Government has not come back. Local authorities have to supply that TAP to the Government. As I understand it, the Government has never come back on any of those occasions and asked why they did not fulfil their TAP. They have a legal obligation to produce one but they have no legal obligation to fulfil that TAP and there is the problem.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: I have to attend another committee meeting but will be back in a few minutes.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I thank Mr. L'Estrange very much for the presentation. I have seen so many of these regeneration projects collapse. We have had issues in St. Margaret's, in Avila Park and in St. Joseph's in my own area. When we visited Labre Park with the previous committee, we were all led to believe the community centre would be built, etc., and now there seems to be a reneging on that. I noticed what Dublin City Council was saying about how much this was going to cost and it mentioned €28 million, but €12.4 million was for flood prevention and other things that should have been done anyhow in the past and should not have entered into the equation. That should have been done many years ago if there were concerns about health and safety. To me, throwing that in as a block to getting this done is not acceptable.

It is no coincidence that Labre Park was built on a dump. We also have St. Joseph's, which is built beside a dump. It seems they have done this in the case of a number of Traveller sites and it is totally unacceptable that has happened over the years. In my opinion, there is a resistance to going ahead with these projects and I agree with Mr. L'Estrange on that point. Part of the thinking is that there are other reasons for this. There will be massive levies from the projects that are being built around there and they can be utilised as well as those from the different departments, from the Dublin City Council Traveller section and from the Minister and the Department. There are also levies there. If they are going to 4,000 apartments there will be massive levies to be gotten and some of that should be put in to do this job once and for all and not make promises and break them constantly. I find it totally unacceptable that they do that. That is just my comment on that.

I am deeply disturbed by some of the sites I have seen. What is to stop the proper regeneration of the existing houses, with a view to doing the others? I do not understand why

that should not go ahead. It is like they have scrapped everything, in a sense, and that is totally and utterly wrong.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: Dublin City Council is saying that the regeneration was broken into two phases. Phase 1 was the upgrade of the houses and the building of the community centre, and phase 2 was the building of the houses. Phase 2 is gone. Even though Dublin City Council says it is a pause, it has not given us any indication as to what that pause means. We have had pauses before and the community has bought into them. They just do not believe it any more. You cannot have a pause for 25 years and call it a "pause". It is no longer a pause, surely, after 25 years. Sorry, I have lost track.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Phase 1.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: That the site is on a dump is a big concern for me. In regard to the regeneration, let us go back to phase 1. Dublin City Council is saying it will do phase 1. Phase 1, as I outlined in the introduction, incorporated the community centre; it is not part of phase 1 now. It incorporated the membrane going into the floor of the houses; that is not part of phase 1 now. It incorporated the redesign of the interior of the houses. They were built in a substandard way. If you go into a double room of a house in Labre Park, you can fit a double bed into it and you can edge your way around it. That is not a double room; they were single rooms. Houses were given to people as three-bedroom houses but in reality they were one- to two-bedroom houses, if the truth be told. Clúid had identified this and said it would redesign the inside of the houses. Some of those houses would only need to be two-bedroom now because maybe some of the children have moved on and it may be sufficient to redesign them as two-bedroom houses, but some of the houses needed for there to be an extension at the front and back to give the third bedroom back again. That was part of the upgrade of the houses; that is gone. The membrane into the floor of the houses to stop the gases has gone.

Dublin City Council said it is still going ahead with the upgrade of the houses. It is not. It is going ahead with a half-arsed way of doing it, rather than the real way it should be done and the way it was committed to being done. That is what is happening. They said they will do the insulation. That will happen because there is a grant there to insulate these houses anyway. Dublin City Council is not being expensed for them. Dublin City Council said it will put in new windows and doors. Again, that comes under the retrofit scheme. Yes, we will get a bit of a retrofit and a bit of insulation on the houses - whatever - but the real upgrade of these houses was the redesign of the interior.

As well as that, there was to be recognition of the fact that the nomadic nature of the community is not as it was years ago, where there would be a continuous movement around Ireland, stopping off for months and the whole year was spent this way. What happens now more so is a movement during the summer months where the community would move. To do that, people do not use big trailers or the wagons, they use touring caravans. That is the modern wagon, so to speak. The commitment was given that, where possible, behind each house that had enough space a firewall would be built and enough space would be left for a touring caravan to go into that space. That was the commitment as well but that is not part of the upgrade either. It is not an upgrade any more; it is a pretence of an upgrade that is being proposed now and that is unfortunate.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: From Mr. L'Estrange's summarisation of the intention, it certainly looks as though Dublin City Council is trying to put more people out of there and to utilise Labre Park for other means and that is unacceptable.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: Could I also make another comment? This has been very frustrating for us. We have requested through BTAP an explanation of why this regeneration did not go ahead. We have not received one. We want an official explanation; we have not received it. We were told there was a report on the way. We made a freedom of information request to try to ascertain the information that way. It was rejected, saying it was too onerous on Dublin City Council and it would not accept our freedom of information request.

We made a second freedom of information request which we have not had a response to, where we reduced the scale of the timespan and the information we are looking for. We have had no response to that request yet. We made an access to information on the environment, AIE, which is a freedom of information request under the European Environmental Act. We received a response that Dublin City Council was claiming the right to extend the response by another month. Usually, they have to respond within a month. I sat in front of the committee on Traveller accommodation about three or four weeks ago and they said they would write to Dublin City Council to request a response. Maybe the committee has received it but I have not heard anything. I know one of the Deputy's colleagues on the council, Councillor Daithí Doolan, has requested it and was told the report is not ready yet. This is six weeks on from the cancellation of the project and we are still sitting here and do not know why this has happened. This is a total disregard and disrespect for the community, absolutely.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Maybe the committee could write as well asking why these requests have not been responded to. That might be something we could do.

An Cathaoirleach: We have done so. Representatives from Dublin City Council are coming in.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: We can tackle them but you will not get an answer on what is requested.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: We will all press it.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: We will press it on this.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank the Deputies. Is there anything further that the witnesses need to add?

Ms Breda Berry: We also have about 90 children under the age of 18. We have a park but we kind of got the park by a fluke because an organisation donated money, and then Dublin City Council topped it up. Only for that, we would not even have a play area for the children. There are dire conditions for everybody. Everybody is suffering in this day and age, the year 2026. It is not acceptable anymore.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: Could I make one final point, Chair?

An Cathaoirleach: Of course.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: It really is worth noting that I am very concerned about the possibility for gases coming up through these existing homes. That is a really big concern for me, even if we set everything else aside. My colleague and I were in the committee room here and we

went up to Labre Park. We got a call from a woman who said there was a gas leak on-site. We went down and for all the world, it smelled like natural gas to me. We thought that it was a really strong smell of gas. We walked around all the bottles of gases and we could not find anything. Then we walked over a manhole and we could get the smell of natural gas coming up through the manhole, as we perceived it to be. We phoned Bord Gáis and staff came out. The minute the guy got out the van he could tell us that it was not natural gas. He said it was probably liquefied petroleum gas, LPG, or something rotten. He put his meter down and said, "Yes, I told you it was not".

We went back to DCC and asked what was going on here. We said we were getting gases coming up through the ground. The first thing that came to mind was one of two things: first, the dump or, second, the poor infrastructure on the basis that it was never built for permanency. It was built on an *ad hoc* basis. The gases coming up were deemed to be coming up through the sewerage system, which would indicate the poor infrastructure within it. There were no blockages. Usually if there is a build-up of gases, it would be associated with some sort of blockage or a build-up of material. There are no blockages or overflow of sewerage coming out anywhere.

We phoned DCC and it sent a contractor out and said not to worry about and that it is not a big problem. I asked the officials to give it in writing that there was no danger because I imagine if I put a match to it - it smelled like gas to me - it would blow the hell out of everybody. They said there were no problems and no danger there. We still have not got word back from DCC on what caused the gas build-up there and how it was addressed. The community has not been told. As an organisation, we, who reported it, have not been told either. It raises those concerns we have in relation to the safety of living in a site built on a dump in an *ad hoc* fashion.

Deputy John Connolly: I am not familiar with the site or the history of the site but one of the things that occurred to me reading through the opening statement is that a pivotal point in the progression of any project through a local authority is the Part 8 planning notice and vote. Have either of the processes the witnesses outlined got to that Part 8 process yet, where design went on public display and then it was brought back before the elected members for a vote?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: That is a really good question. We have always seen the Part 8 application as being the golden ticket. That is the indication that we are going to move forward. We have pushed and pushed for Part 8 to be applied for because we felt it was probably a point of no return. That was our impression. The latest plan was brought before the local traveller accommodation consultative committee, LTACC, in, I think, April. We met as an LTACC and Councillor Hazel de Nortúin, who sits on the committee, asked for Part 8 - even though the submission had been made to Government for the funding - to be applied now, to have the two running in tandem. She pinpointed the Cherry Orchard development where this was happening. She was pushed back by Dublin City Council, which said it cannot and that it was too dangerous. The council said that in case something went wrong with the funding application, it would be too dangerous running the two in tandem. I could not see where the danger was or where the loss would be. If the application failed, all that happens is that you have lost your Part 8. There is no big loss here. The council refused to run the two in tandem. That gave an indication and raised an awful lot of red flags at that stage that there was a problem here, it does not want to apply for Part 8 and there is something else going on in the background. The only conclusion was that it never intended to apply using Part 8. It was never intended to

happen. We waited on the six previous occasions and on, I think, three of those occasions, we had pushed DCC to apply for Part 8 and it never applied for it. That it was never applied for is a big concern for us.

Deputy John Connolly: When the witnesses went back to the proposal from 2018 that collapsed in 2020, they said that it collapsed due to questionable objections from within DCC. Am I to take it that that is the executive or the elected members?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: No, the elected members have been behind this project from day one. We never had any objection. The funny thing about it is that usually when you have a project like this, you have two big concerns. One is funding and the second is objections from councillors and local residents. Neither of those was at play. It was always claimed that the funding was there from the Department. No councillors were objecting to it and no residents anywhere nearby were objecting to it either. We knew it would sail through. If Part 8 was applied for, it was nearly a given that it was going to happen. Again, that begs the question: why it was never pushed forward?

Deputy John Connolly: Mr. L'Estrange called the objections "questionable".

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: When the 2018 proposal collapsed in 2020, Clúid had put a comprehensive plan together for the regeneration to happen, allowing for the possibility of it being built on a flood plain. It knew it was and it put a plan in place to alleviate that. Before the plan collapsed, Dublin City Council entered into negotiations with Clúid's engineering department. I put in a freedom of information request at the time and I could see all the information going back and forward between Clúid and the engineering department. Clúid put up a robust argument for this to go ahead. It argued a really solid case and DCC's drainage and engineering department could only hang its hat on a River Camac report that had not been completed and would be completed within 12 months, and it could make a final decision on it when that was done. That was in 2020, looking into 2021. We are now in the middle of 2026 and that Camac report has never been completed. It is still not available. The thing the council was hanging its hat on never materialised. That is what makes me think its objection was questionable at that stage.

Clúid had done a really fine job in proposing all the alleviation measures for flooding. To my mind, there were no problems there. Even at this stage, when it was then scaled back to just ten houses, which would not be built in what was, as Dublin City Council perceived it, the most dangerous parts of the site for flooding, in line with the houses already *in situ*, and on a site where there was previously housing, it was agreed to move forward. At the last minute then, as we understand it, when we were led to believe by Dublin City Council that it had agreement, it did what would be considered to be a pre-Part 8. It circulated all the drawings in late 2025 to all the departments within DCC, saying, "Have a look at this. Tell us if there are any problems. We do not want to hit the same things we hit in 2020 where, suddenly and out of the blue, we are told we cannot go ahead because of the flooding problem. Tell us what you think". That passed muster. Everybody in DCC agreed and said go ahead with our application to the Department. As we understand it, the application to the Department was made around January 2026. Then, all of a sudden, we were told, "Okay, change of heart. The drainage department has said it is not happy with it and is pulling back on its acceptance of the plan going ahead". It blows my mind. I cannot understand it. It defies any credibility as to the reasoning for this.

Deputy John Connolly: Has anybody ever put a costing on the drainage works?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: No, not the drainage or the alleviation measures for potential flooding. If it had stuck with the Clúid plan, initially there was €8 million but the majority of that was to decontaminate the soil that was to be removed. The cheap part was about €1 million or so, which is not cheap, to lift the soil out of there but the decontamination of the soil was where the expense was. The Department of housing said it is not prepared to do that or fund it. That is where the first collapse happened. That removal of soil would not have needed to happen if they had gone with the Clúid plan anyway.

Deputy John Connolly: Did that Clúid plan include - I forget the description Mr. L'Estrange used - the membrane?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: That is a separate issue. That is in the houses. If you can imagine it, there is a road going through Labre Park and the left hand side is the canal side. That is where the potential flood comes from - a small stream that runs down beside the houses. You have the trailers, a small stream and then the canal. The canal is not the problem; the small stream is the problem.

That is the one that floods. It only floods if the culvert that runs through the back of Labre Park is blocked. If it is maintained well, it does not flood. If a grid were put on it to stop the culvert blocking, then we would not have a problem. The flooding happens because of poor maintenance, not because of the nature of the land.

Deputy John Connolly: Even if we remediated the potential flood, is there still the issue of the contamination of the soil?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: Yes. 100%.

Deputy John Connolly: Okay. That still has a significant cost to-----

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: No. Clúid Housing has come up with a plan to put a membrane on the contaminated soil area, which would be a large grass area. A membrane would be put down on that, it would be covered with so many centimetres of clay, and this would eliminate the potential for any danger from that. It would be less than €1 million to do that.

Deputy John Connolly: Is Clúid saying that this measure will mean the soil does not need to be remediated?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: Yes.

Deputy John Connolly: And it is happy it is safe?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: It is very happy that it would be safe. It does say that a membrane would have to be put into each of the existing homes and the new homes to stop gasses coming up through the floor.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I thank Mr. L'Estrange for the presentation. He has explained everything very well. As somebody who is not from Dublin, I do not know Labre Park. I do not think I have ever been to it and I do not think I could actually find it if I went looking for it. Mr. L'Estrange has explained painfully the problems they have had over the years and I recognise the frustration. I have been involved in a number of projects in my own area, and

when they collapse, it is devastating for people. Sometimes these are people from the council who had good intentions. It is hard to see the litany of failures here. Dublin City Council was in afterwards here and its representatives said that continued development remains a priority. What the hell is a priority for them if the witnesses are here 20-odd years later and nothing has been done? My local Traveller site in Limerick would be Longpavement. That has been built on a dump as well. It seems to be a pattern across the State to build such sites on dumps. Longpavement is a temporary halting site that has been there for at least 26 or 27 years.

I do not have any questions for the witnesses. They have answered it all and I thank them for saying it. Mr. L'Estrange said they had put in a request to Dublin City Council. What was the official request they were looking for? The freedom of information requests did not come back properly. What was the Ballyfermot Travellers Action Project looking for? Was it an exact official response as to why this project has collapsed at this time?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: We were looking for the communications that exist between all the entities that were involved in the regeneration - I cannot remember dates now but they were in and around 2023 to date - in relation to the potential for flooding and any other issues relating to the regeneration of Labre Park. I cannot recall the exact wording but that is pretty much what we looked for.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: That is fine. We can ask them when they come in later on why that has not been done and, if the project is not going ahead, whose fault is it. We can ask if it is lack of funding from the Department, if it is Dublin City Council not wanting to do it, or if these are spurious problems they are talking about. Let us be clear about this. Sometimes when they are doing Traveller accommodation they are dealing with objections from local residents and local elected representatives, but it does not seem to be the case here. That makes it even more bizarre as to why this project has not moved on faster than it has.

The questions I have are for Dublin City Council, to be honest, and we will see how we can follow up from this as well. I do not want the witnesses coming in here and us not able to come back to them with some sort of an answer, or at least after we chase it up with Dublin City Council. I hope the witnesses will sit in the Gallery when they come in and we will see how they get on or whatever.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: I am sorry I was a little bit late. I thank the witnesses for the presentation. I have one question about the difference between the two FOI requests. I think Mr. L'Estrange was saying that one was narrower than the other but still has not been answered. Will Mr. L'Estrange characterise that for me and describe that? How is it narrower?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: We reduced the timescale down. We took 18 months off the timeframe in which we were looking for the information. That was the most significant part, and we also homed in on the decision-making process as opposed to the wider engagement with local residents.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: Was it still drainage related?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: It was to do with the flooding.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: It was flooding related. I agree with Deputy Ellis that we should write to the city council separate to all this. I know its representatives will be in here this afternoon, but we should write to the council and say this committee is also interested in seeing

that FOI request and ask that it forward the copy to the Ballyfermot Travellers Action Project and to this committee.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: We have also requested an FOI from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage asking it to give us any communications it had with Dublin City Council on this. I understand this is being processed at the moment and it has not made any objections to that.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: How long is that request with the Department?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: That is with the Department since the second week in April. We got a response from it to say it was being processed and that the Department would come back to us if there were any objections. We are hoping we can get some information from that. We have taken a legal stand on this. Our solicitor, Ms Sinéad Lucey from FLAC, is representing us in this regard and she is giving us our direction in relation to the FOI. When our first FOI was refused, we contacted the person who refused it and we asked them to engage with us to find out if we could find a way forward to get an FOI that would work. The response was that it was not their responsibility to engage with us to design an FOI, that it was our business, and to go away and do it. This is counter to the Act. The Act says that they need to engage with the body looking for the FOI to see if there is a way it can be done. They completely rejected us and told us to go away and find a way to make it ourselves. They did not engage. Our solicitor gave us another wording for it and we wrote back and gave them the alternative FOI, but we did say we were reserving our right to go back to the full one at some stage in the future because we felt they were unfair in not engaging with us to find a way forward on the first one.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: I agree with approach Deputy Ellis set out.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I apologise for my delay. Unfortunately, I was at the Committee of Public Accounts next door and I only finished speaking there a few minutes ago.

This does seem a saga for over three decades at this stage, reading the documentation and all the various revised plans and so on that were put forward and never materialised, and now the most recent plan from 2025. How many members of the Traveller community live in Labre Park?

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: It is actually increasing. The number is fluid given the nomadic nature of the community. There is a big movement now. I think we have seen about six families move in over the last three months or so. They have taken up bays that had been disused or are just in a really poor condition. There is no sanitation available and no electricity. They just rocked up and put caravans in because they have nowhere else to go. The estimate at the moment is about 50 families in there. We can extrapolate the numbers from that. If it is three children per family and an average of two adults, then it is five people by 50, so it is some 250 people.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: With 50 families. Okay. Thanks for that. I missed the earlier discussion, but the fact the site was built on a former dump or landfill or whatever you want to call it obviously raises huge health concerns going forward. Whatever plan is put in place will provide protective barriers and so on, but as of right now, the families are effectively exposed to the leakage from the various gas emissions and so on.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: Yes 100%, and we do not know how much damage has been done through the community since 1967 when they moved in there. There could be massive damage that people just do not know about. We know the Traveller community has poor health outcomes. It is worse than the settled community and here is another good reason they would have poorer health outcomes. It is an accumulation of disadvantage and total disregard. We cannot avoid going back to the first point, that it is the determination to assimilate the community into settled accommodation. We keep being brought back to this point. That is what it is about. If there was a seriousness about this, the regeneration of Labre Park would have happened years ago.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Yes. There is something particularly distasteful about building on a former dump in the first place, but then just letting families be exposed to the serious health hazards that are undoubtedly well evidenced from former dumps and landfill in terms of what goes on beneath the surface with gasses is very serious.

I note the community centre was shelved in the most recent plan. Obviously that is a pretty devastating blow to the community, not having a community centre.

Ms Breda Berry: It is, because the community centre is the heart of every community. Everything expands from it. All of the other local services the children and families work with engage under the one roof. It is a win for everybody to have a community centre.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: It is. If you want to build a proper community, you need a base where people can get under the one roof and mix. The plan is a retrograde step. We will take it up with the city council. I am not here to question the witnesses as such. I am just here to listen to what they have to say. I again apologise that I missed a lot of the session earlier.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: The community and cultural centre, as I refer to it, would have provided a unique opportunity to take the development of Traveller culture and work with the Traveller community in a new direction. It is evident that no new sites are going to be built in Dublin. It is very difficult for members of the Travelling community who want to engage with their culture to do so. If we had been allowed to go ahead with this community and cultural centre, which was to be built on the edge of Labre Park, not only the Travelling community could have engaged with it, but newer communities coming to Ireland also could have engaged with it. There could have been an exchange of cultures in this space. The wider community - the settled community - could also have engaged with it, breaking down the barriers that exist at the moment. It was a really novel idea and we believed it would have been a great step forward and could have been used as a model right across the State. When I was looking at the television the other night, I saw the President going to visit a cultural centre in London. That is what we need. We need the community to be able to engage in a positive way in a centre and not to have to be restricted to living on a particular site to engage with it. It would give people the opportunity to retain and engage with their culture on a continuous basis. It was a great idea but it is unfortunately now gone. That is a missed opportunity.

An Cathaoirleach: I think that is all the questioning. I thank both witnesses for coming along. As Deputies and Senators have alluded to, it has not been about questioning the witnesses but rather about gleaning information about the multiple abandonments of Labre Park - I would not even call them delays - to inform the questions we will put to the witnesses in the next session. We will certainly do whatever we can to move this process along because

what the witnesses have outlined as regards the conditions people have been forced to endure is simply appalling and unacceptable in a modern society. I thank the witnesses very much. We look forward to engaging with them again in the future. If there is anything we can bring to the table in terms of bringing this issue to a successful conclusion, we will do our best to do so.

Mr. Shay L'Estrange: I thank members for their time.

An Cathaoirleach: We will suspend for a few minutes as we invite our next set of witnesses in.

Sitting suspended at 1.43 p.m. and resumed at 1.48 p.m.

An Cathaoirleach: Our next witnesses are from the housing department in Dublin City Council. They are: Mr. Mick Mulhern, assistant chief executive; Mr. Stephen Wearen, project manager; and Ms. June Walsh, administrative officer. As they are within the precincts of Leinster House, they are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the presentations they make to the committee. This means they have an absolute defence against any defamation action for anything they say at the meeting. However, they are expected not to abuse this privilege and it is my duty, as Cathaoirleach, to ensure this privilege is not abused. Therefore, if their statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative that they comply with any such direction.

I now invite Mr. Mulhern to make the opening statement. We will then proceed with a session of questions and answers.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: I am the assistant chief executive in Dublin City Council with overall responsibility for housing. I am joined by my colleagues, Ms June Walsh and Mr. Stephen Wearen, from Dublin City Council housing teams. I thank the committee members for the opportunity to address them today on Dublin City Council's work in delivering and maintaining Traveller accommodation in the city.

Dublin City Council's Traveller action programme, TAP, has committed to the delivery of high-quality Traveller accommodation to meet the housing needs of families identified through our recent assessments. Today in the city there are five halting sites, seven group housing sites containing 135 houses, and four basic service sites. The annual Traveller count prepared for the TAP, which has since been updated, identified 854 families in the Dublin city area but the need to provide 170 homes over the life of the TAP.

Dublin City Council intends to address the identified need through a construction and refurbishment programme, which includes the refurbishment and extension of existing sites, Part V developments, standard housing, acquisitions and the development of new sites. The council will continue to consult and liaise with all relevant stakeholders to assist with the implementation of this programme, including the families in need of housing, the local Traveller accommodation consultative committee, LTACC, inter-agency groups, national organisations, Traveller residents associations and local advocacy groups.

Labre Park holds a unique and long-standing role as the State's oldest purpose-built Traveller accommodation scheme. Its continued development remains a priority for Dublin City Council, both in terms of improving living conditions for existing residents and delivering

new culturally appropriate housing. The site presents significant and well-documented challenges. Located within flood zone A and developed historically on a former landfill site, Labre Park is subject to complex environmental constraints. These include flood risk, drainage limitations and ground contamination, all of which have materially impacted the viability and our ability to progress.

The most recent planning Part 8 application proposed the refurbishment of 18 existing homes, the delivery of 12 new homes and a range of broader estate upgrades. During the pre-application stage in advance of this submission, significant flood risk concerns were raised by Dublin City Council's drainage and flooding team who have indicated that they are not in a position to support the current proposal if this application were to be submitted. As a result, it has not been possible to submit the proposed Part 8 planning application. Despite sustained efforts since 2019, including multiple design iterations and funding applications, regeneration proposals for Labre Park have not advanced. This has been primarily due to the flooding issues, the scale of mitigation required, the associated costs as well as concerns raised by statutory consultees regarding downstream flood impacts and the broader environmental risk.

We recognise that Dublin City Council's failure to secure approval for a regeneration plan for Labre Park, and it is deeply frustrating for us and for the local community, the residents and all stakeholders involved. In response, and following initial engagement with internal and external stakeholders, a revised approach has been adopted. The regeneration programme is now being progressed in two distinct phases. Phase 1 prioritises the immediate improvement of living conditions for current residents and includes the energy retrofit of 18 existing homes to a minimum B2 BER, being delivered under Dublin City Council's energy efficiency retrofit programme. Surveys for these works have now been completed in the last couple of months, with works programmed to take place commencing in late 2026 or early 2027. The types of works include windows, solar panels, external insulation, heating upgrades and attic insulation. Second, existing homes will also receive broader refurbishment works. Condition surveys have now been completed and works on homes will commence in late 2026-early 2027. The types of works for this will include kitchen refurbishment, bathroom refurbishment, painting throughout, new storage, etc. Third, a broader programme of refurbishment and estate enhancements will also be progressed. Further decisions on funding and design work are required to include a range of works identified in the most recent Part 8. The types of work will include making good external working areas, fire walls, full refurbishments and estate improvement works.

Phase 2 focuses on establishing a robust evidence base to support future housing development on the remainder of the site. This will initially focus on the preparation of a detailed site-specific flood risk assessment, including hydraulic modelling, in collaboration with Dublin City Council's drainage and planning teams. The outcome of this work will determine the feasibility of developing new homes, a community centre at Labre Park and appropriate mitigation measures required.

Delivery of routine maintenance across all Dublin City Council's Traveller accommodation is managed by our Traveller accommodation unit. In 2025, we received and completed 613 general maintenance requests across the city. Specifically at Labre Park, Dublin City Council received 100 maintenance requests and all were works completed in a timely manner. Works included kitchen and bathroom upgrades, gully cleaning, public lighting, and road and footway

repairs. Significant repairs were also completed on four bays in Labre Park, including resurfacing, new boundary walls and new drainage. The total revenue spend for 2025 was over €500,000 in Labre Park and Kylemore Grove, with €2.5 million spent across all Dublin City Council sites.

The wider provision of services to the Traveller community includes the caravan loan scheme, including emergency caravans. Since 2022, a total of 52 caravans have been funded from this scheme and 58 from the emergency scheme. The total expenditure in 2025 was €1.4 million for 26 caravans, including four for Labre Park.

Since 2020, there have been 111 homes allocated to Traveller families in Dublin City Council, including 27 homes allocated in 2025. There are 104 applicants who currently have Traveller priority on Dublin City Council's housing waiting list, and there are a further 73 applications which have confirmed their identity as Traveller. We have only been recording this information since 2023.

We recognise the importance of building new Traveller accommodation. In addition to Labre Park we are progressing capital projects for Avila Park, Cara Park, Camac Park and Reuben Street. Further to this capital programme, the housing department has undertaken an assessment of all potential housing development sites within the city. As part of this assessment, sites that may meet the future requirements for culturally appropriate accommodation will be identified and further investigated. This work is now under way, and it is the intention of Dublin City Council to identify at least one site on the north of the city and one site on the south of the city to facilitate the delivery of new Traveller accommodation.

Dublin City Council's failure to secure a suitable plan for the regeneration of Labre Park is disappointing. We acknowledge the legitimate frustrations felt by the local families, communities and all parties involved. While the regeneration of Labre Park has encountered considerable challenges, we remain committed to trying to find a deliverable, sustainable and appropriate housing solution for the Traveller community. It is our firm plan to progress immediate improvements to the existing homes and works within the estate where possible and at the same time to advance the technical work required to determine if we can unlock the future development while actively identifying alternative opportunities to meet the accommodation needs of the Traveller community across the broader city.

An Cathaoirleach: We will now move to the question and answer session.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I thank Mr. Mulhern for the presentation. What was the most recent new Traveller site built by Dublin City Council?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: In terms of direct new builds, it was not in the last number of years but we have delivered five new bays this year.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: By "last number of years" does Mr. Mulhern mean five years, ten years or 20 years?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: I do not have that figure yet but it is a considerable amount of time.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Mr. Mulhern does not know.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: In the last ten years there has been no direct new build Traveller accommodation.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: That allows us see why we have the problem. Before Dublin City Council representatives came in, the Ballyfermot Traveller Action Group representatives were in and were talking about Labre Park. I am not from Dublin and do not know the Dublin area very well. They expressed their concerns and were a lot more measured than I would be if I were living in the situation they are living in with the frustrations they have endured over a number of years, with projects that were supposed to be delivered not having been delivered. Has there ever been a Part 8 brought forward for Labre Park? I am not talking in recent terms; I mean, ever.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Ever submitted? I cannot speak to when it was originally built in the first instance. I am not sure what the process would have been back when this estate was originally constructed. However, since 2019-----

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: My understanding is that a number of projects or redevelopments were supposed to have been done. Were any of those a Part 8?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Since 2019, we have made three attempts to bring forward schemes that were variations on a similar scheme. They have not come to Part 8 because of significant technical issues which meant our planning team were not able to support the proposals.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: We were also informed that the Ballyfermot Traveller Action Project was looking to get some documentation from Dublin City Council and that it had put in a number of freedom of information requests that have not been addressed as of yet. I understand this was raised at Dublin City Council by certain councillors. Will Mr. Mulhern give a commitment here that Dublin City Council will give some information to this committee as to why this project is not going forward? I know what was said in the opening statement.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Yes, absolutely. We met with the LTACC about a month ago and we committed at that point to preparing a full, comprehensive report that we would issue to the LTACC and all the local area councillors. We would be very happy to share that with this committee. It is due to be completed within the next week or two and it will be shared with all parties, including the committee, at that point. We have received an FOI and an access to information on the environment, AIE, request in terms of Labre Park.

An exercise was undertaken with our FOI team to refine the initial FOI response, in line with the legislation, into a more manageable response. The team is working on the response and it will be issued, fully in accordance with our requirements, to the person who submitted it. If the latter is comfortable for the response to be shared, we have no problem with that.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Did Mr. Mulhern indicate the response will be ready in a week to two weeks?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: We have committed to producing an overall report. In our meetings with the LTACC, several legitimate questions were raised by the committee and by our councillors and other stakeholders. The report we are working on is a full report that addresses all questions raised. Separate to that is the FOI request, to which we must respond by 12 June. We will do our best to issue it in advance of that date. It requires a sizeable response and a significant amount of information. We hope to issue the response sooner than 12 June. The full report, which answers the questions, is due to be issued in the next week or two.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Will we receive a copy of that?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Yes, certainly. We have no issue with that.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Mr. Mulhern indicated that €500,000 was spent on the 613 general maintenance requests and that all of them were done. Does "done" refer to cases closed or actual works done?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Those 613 requests were the total number across the city. Approximately 100 of them related to Labre Park, of which all those that were raised with us through the maintenance process have been addressed.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I do not know what those requests concerned but if, for example, one was a request for installation of a shower, does that mean the person has a shower? Is that correct or might it be the case that the work is being looked at or has been assigned?

Ms June Walsh: As far as I am aware, all our 2025 maintenance has been completed. If someone required a shower replacement and that met the need, it would have been replaced.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Only live submissions that have come through in the past short period may still be outstanding.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Are the witnesses saying there are no outstanding cases remaining to be completed?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: We are saying all maintenance requests raised in 2025 have been addressed and closed.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I receive responses from Limerick City and County Council stating that issues are resolved where that means they are not resolved but have been sent to somebody else to deal with.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: I say "closed" as in completed or a response provided to say no works are required. Whichever it might be, the council has no outstanding maintenance jobs to respond to from 2025. There may be requests that have come in this year, which we would need to look at.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I thank the witnesses.

Senator Eileen Flynn: How many residents are there on the Labre Park site?

Ms June Walsh: There are officially 32 families on the site at the moment. Our Traveller accounts do not break the numbers down by site.

Senator Eileen Flynn: How many human beings, including men, women and children, is Dublin City Council working with in Labre Park?

Ms June Walsh: My apologies but I do not have that information. I will revert to our social work section and issue a response, I hope by tomorrow.

Senator Eileen Flynn: I know for a fact there are more than 200 people in Labre Park. Dublin City Council has let them down for over 25 years. I was born and reared in Labre Park. I was chairperson of the Ballyfermot Travellers Action Project for a number of years. Will the council witnesses say who stopped the redevelopment of Labre Park, or its regeneration, to be

politically correct about it, in 2025? Which council department stopped that redevelopment? The committee would be really grateful if they could answer that.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: I need to give a little context to my answer. In 2019, a planning application was prepared that did not make it to submission stage because of flooding concerns raised at that point. In 2022, a revised proposal was drawn up that included significant flooding works. We were unable at that point to secure funding for the level of flood mitigation works proposed.

Senator Eileen Flynn: To the best of my knowledge, the funding was secured from the Department of climate in 2024. Does Mr. Mulhern have any information on that?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Of the €8 million or so of works included in the 2022 proposals, we did not get funding for the level of flooding mitigation required. At that point, we revised the proposal. We started our pre-application discussions for the scaled-back plan at Labre Park, which included the 18 refurbishments and the 12 new builds, in January this year. That process involved preparing our plan, which had been worked on for a number of years, and circulating it to all the technical teams in Dublin City Council. At that point, the flooding team advised us it could not support the delivery of new homes at Labre Park because the site is in a flood zone A location. I can explain that further if the Senator wishes. At that stage, knowing the flooding team would not support the planning application when submitted, we did not formally submit it.

Senator Eileen Flynn: To clarify, it was the council that did not submit the application?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Our planning team would not have been able to bring a report to our councillors recommending approval of the scheme because it could not, as it stood, be supported on flooding grounds.

Senator Eileen Flynn: The committee needs to write to the Department of climate about this. I was working at the time with the Ballyfermot Travellers Action Project, members of whom are in the Gallery. The then Minister of State, Ossian Smyth, supported us to get funding. We secured funding for the playing field at the time. I do not know from where this misinformation is coming, and it is misinformation. That funding was there and was dealt with at one point, to the best of my knowledge. This leads me to another question. Who in Dublin City Council decided not to put the application forward for the next stage?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: That would be me, and the reason was that our planning team would not have been able to support the planning application.

Senator Eileen Flynn: What is Mr. Mulhern's qualification in flood risk areas and so on?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: I am not so qualified but our flooding team, which is led by our senior flood engineer, has assessed the scheme and said it cannot support it. We take that team's advice. It has said it cannot support it and, therefore, the scheme cannot go ahead in its current guise. We cannot submit a planning application that our planning team would refuse on the grounds of flooding issues. We know the team would say that based on the flood risk concerns raised at the pre-party stage, it could not recommend approving it. Therefore, it could not go to the council.

Senator Eileen Flynn: We do not usually do this but will the Cathaoirleach agree to the committee writing to the Department of climate to ask how much money was allocated to the flood field in Labre Park and why it was not drawn down?

An Cathaoirleach: A parliamentary question could be tabled on it.

Senator Eileen Flynn: That would be good, if it is okay with other members. If it is any way possible, I ask Mr. Mulhern to please answer the first question I asked him, which I will repeat. I need the information for future reference. Who stopped the regeneration of Labre Park, home to more than 200 human beings and the oldest halting site in Ireland, from happening? Which department in Dublin City Council made that decision, and why?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: I believe I answered the question in saying that our flooding team has said it cannot support the planning application as presented and, therefore, it is not possible for that planning application to be submitted. We have not submitted the planning application on the grounds that it cannot, as it currently stands, be supported by the flooding team.

Senator Eileen Flynn: Mr. Mulhern stopped the application because of the advice he received from his colleagues. I am glad to have the detail about the flooding department as we need all that information to put to the Government. Would the witnesses be able to come back before the committee in the future to focus on this single issue of the redevelopment of Labre Park? I was born and reared on the site. To many people, it might just be a place where knackers or Travellers live but they are living human beings. They deserve justice, equality and a home to live in.

I have to put these questions to Mr. Mulhern. This is my job as a legislator. We continue to fail our Traveller community, not just in Labre Park, but at other halting sites too. Previously, before Dublin City Council came in, we put the question to a current resident on the site: what is the hope going forward? Her reply was that it needs a miracle. We asked the co-ordinator of the Ballymun Traveller action project if he believed local authorities are trying to demolish all halting sites, including Labre Park. He said that he did. Is that the case?

To be fair to the council, there have been no builds in Traveller accommodation in over ten years. No house has been built for Traveller accommodation. How much money has Dublin City Council spent out of Traveller accommodation on waste management? Is that still happening?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: How much have we spent on-----

Senator Eileen Flynn: Is waste management coming out of the Traveller accommodation budget?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Is that waste management in terms of removal of waste from Traveller sites?

Senator Eileen Flynn: Yes.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Yes, we fund the removal of-----

Senator Eileen Flynn: That comes out of the one budget for accommodation.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: In terms of our budget, we spent-----

Senator Eileen Flynn: It is a yes-or-no question, to be fair. I have asked if that comes out of the-----

Mr. Mick Mulhern: I have said that, yes, when we remove waste from a Traveller accommodation site, it comes out of our revenue budget, not our capital budget.

Senator Eileen Flynn: When Mr. Mulherin talks about the four bays in Labre Park, they are the refurbished bays, the ones facing No. 7 and No. 5. They are not new builds. They are refurbished.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Yes, refurbished.

An Cathaoirleach: To assist in this part of the discussion, how many times has Labre Park flooded? Is there a flooding problem there already? Second, was there a possibility that the moneys that could have been made available would have resolved or mitigated any future flooding?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Again, a broader response is probably needed on this. I will explain where we are at because there are multiple elements, and it is not a straightforward answer. I think this goes to some of the legitimate frustrations that the community and local groups feel. I can totally appreciate why this looks like the council has changed its mind on the scheme.

In 2019, the planning application that was proceeding at that time was for a scheme. The county development plan in place at that time did not identify Labre Park as a flood zone A location. That was based on national flooding modelling that is done under CFRAM, which identifies all of the flood zones across the entire country. At that time, it was based on modelling from 2011. Our previous county development plan was based on that level of modelling information. At that time, our drainage and flooding team said it had concerns about the flooding issues at Labre Park. However, it was not in flood zone A at the time, so in principle, housing could have been delivered at this location. The team identified several measures that needed to get done, which we felt we could address through gully cleaning, raising the level of the road, raising the level of the houses, a flood wall defence and so on. Those were the measures that we felt would address the concerns raised by our flooding team in 2019.

Our new county development plan, which was adopted in 2022, is based on an up-to-date flooding model, which is done nationally. The River Camac was modelled for the original plan and now all of its tributaries are modelled. The Gallblack, which runs beside the site, is now included in that modelling work. As a result, this area is now identified as being in flood zone A and flood zone B, although it was not previously, when the last application was being considered.

Now that this application has landed in front of our flooding team, based on the current plan and current modelling, and the fact that it is now in flood zone A and flood zone B, the team is saying that while in the last application there were mitigations that we could introduce, there are now significant concerns at play based on the state of current planning policy. The team has to assess the scheme as it stands today.

An Cathaoirleach: No mitigation could have alleviated any of the flooding.

Senator Eileen Flynn: I have two more questions.

An Cathaoirleach: I will let you in, Senator. I just want to get clarity on this issue. Senator Flynn is posing a valid question. Has there been flooding in Labre Park to date?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: What we had submitted was the evidence of the flood-related activities in the area. We did a report that we felt would address the concerns. We knew it was in flood zone A, and we set out a package of measures that we felt would deal with those issues. Given that it is in flood zone A, where we are not allowed to deliver residential without significant mitigation and justification work, the team said that what we submitted was insufficient to allow them to recommend approval for a housing scheme on that site.

An Cathaoirleach: Did the team advise in any way, shape or form what would be acceptable?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: We have started a piece of work to get a flood specialist in, with their support and guidance about what exactly would need to be done.

An Cathaoirleach: Such as culverting.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: It would be sizeable.

Senator Eileen Flynn: It is important that I am fair. I know that in the last few years, a playpark was put in for the children in Labre Park, which is welcome. I understand that Dublin City Council is trying its best, to a certain extent. I have two questions. What, if anything, is happening with the redevelopment? Dublin City Council is saying it is paused. We do not believe that for a minute. The residents of Labre Park do not believe that for a minute. We believe that Dublin City Council, with no evidence to back it up, is going to demolish Labre Park and use it for apartments, but not for Traveller accommodation, which would be devastating for the community as a whole. That is more of a statement than a question.

Dublin City Council is saying the development is paused. What is the way forward for the more than 200 people who are on the site, including children? What is Dublin City Council's message to the community of Labre Park on the continued failing of our community for over 25 years? Part 8 cannot be seen as an excuse. There was never any grant around Part 8 for Labre Park and the businesses around it. What is the way forward? Does Dublin City Council know when the pause is going to be lifted? Does it know when the redevelopment will go ahead?

Can Mr. Mulherin be honest with the children of Labre Park? These children deserve safe accommodation. That is still not the case in Labre Park. I remember Breda, when her children were just toddlers and newborn babies, sitting around at committees. It is not regrettable; it is absolutely devastating. What is the way forward with the redevelopment? Has Dublin City Council got a way forward?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: The Senator is right to be frustrated, and we could use more appropriate language outside this room. We are not here defending what we have done at Labre Park. We have not delivered a scheme in line with how projects should be progressed. We cannot defend where we are with Labre Park. What we are trying to do is figure out a way forward. We have to explain, and as I said, we will have a report that tries to explain the questions that have legitimately been asked of us. We have to provide that report and be interrogated, and that will be done in the next week or two.

Senator Eileen Flynn: We will invite Dublin City Council back to the committee.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: We have committed to going back to the LTACC and talking to our councillors. We are not going to hide any information. We just need a little time to produce it and share it with everybody. We will come back in here and talk to the LTACC.

The Senator's point is the right one: what is next? What we are saying is that we are committed to the refurbishment of 18 existing houses and the two houses that were burned down in the area, where there is significant damage. We are committed to carrying out estate-wide refurbishment works, like road upgrades, footpath upgrades and lighting upgrades, and there is also energy efficiency work in the refurbishment of the houses. That is trying to deal with the living conditions in the 18 houses that are currently occupied and the two vacant ones that can be filled, with Traveller families moving in there. That is something that we are actively working on right now. We have done a lot of survey work in the last two or three months to determine exactly what works are needed. We have our commitment to move through that. We would hope to be out on site, doing the refurbishment works, by the end of this year, and delivering a lot of those works during 2027.

In terms of the new build, I have to be honest that it is really challenging to find a way forward.

For us, what is needed is the detailed hydraulic flooding model that Mr. Wearan is actively procuring. We have been told by our flooding team that it will likely take four to six months to have the output of that work. As part of the modelling, we will be asking our team to assess new housing, new caravans, a community centre and the impact of the Camac flood alleviation scheme. All of those things will be wrapped into a very specific study. Again, we will engage with the community and with the committee on the output of all of that. Once we have that, either something will be possible or housing will not be possible. At that point, we will be able to determine how best to move forward.

At the same time, what we will be doing in the background is working on a plan B for what happens if housing is not possible, because we cannot wait until the end of the study to determine what to do. Ultimately, it will be about determining the plan B if housing is not acceptable. Over recent months, we have initiated a search for additional sites across the council area – one part in the north of the city and one in the south – to identify new Traveller accommodation sites.

Senator Eileen Flynn: I am finishing but I have just one more point.

An Cathaoirleach: Briefly.

Senator Eileen Flynn: No disrespect, but this is another form of the local authority not speaking to our community on the ground and saying it thinks it is best for them to live in a certain place. That is soul-destroying for our community. We look forward to having the witnesses before the committee in the coming weeks, specifically when the Labre Park report is produced. I thank the witnesses so much for their honesty.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank the Senator. I propose that we invite the witnesses back in December, seven months from now, to give us a report on what the flood team have come back with on hydraulic services and so on. A period of four to six months was mentioned.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Yes, four to six months once the consultants are appointed. What I can do is come back to the committee in the next couple of days with a timeline. There is a procurement element that needs to happen in advance of that. We can write back to the Chair in the next day or two with the exact timeline.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay, and we can decide then.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: We will come back whenever the committee wants.

An Cathaoirleach: If it just sits there, it will go on forever and a day. We need to pursue this to see results.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I thank the witnesses very much for coming in. Probably one of the great disappointments over recent years has been the number of regeneration projects that have not taken place. I can go back 15 or 20 years in respect of various projects promised, whether they relate to St. Margaret's or St. Joseph's Villas. I know we have been talking about Labre Park, but one of the things I wanted to ask about relates to the many environmental issues concerning flood prevention, flood containment and so on. This subject is lumped in with the cost of doing the housing and making the site properly available. Has the Department of the environment been approached on that issue alone to look for funding? It has recently been mentioned that it costs €28 million to do the houses and address the environmental issues. A total of €12.4 million of this is for flood prevention and containment. I am curious about this. Surely these things should have been separate and should have been addressed over a period in looking for funding of the kind in question. Have we specifically considered dealing with the flood plain? The houses themselves have issues that have to be dealt with, and this is not mentioned in the witnesses' report. Those issues are very important. If there are issues with gases, they need to be addressed in the houses themselves as well as elsewhere. I did not see this mentioned in the report.

We were at Dunsink Lane just recently and saw the sites at St. Joseph's and St. Mary's, which are administered by Dublin City Council. There are many issues with St. Joseph's, including its condition. I am curious about this. Based on an arrangement with Fingal County Council, Dublin City Council administers the two sites, but what communications are there between the two councils? There seems to be a huge lack of communication between them.

Dunsink Lane itself, which leads up to St. Joseph's and St. Mary's, is in an appalling state altogether. When it is reported to Dublin City Council, do its officials make representations? I have already reported the matter to Fingal County Council and still have not got a response. The committee has raised issues here with Fingal County Council and it does not seem to get a response. I am just curious as to what goes on.

It is so disappointing in many ways. I do not know how many meetings on St. Margaret's I have been to over the years. One plan after another just disappeared or was put on the long finger. I am aware there are problems in the area at the moment, but there seems to be a pattern. What is happening in Labre Park has happened in other places. Things have been dragged out. We have big plans but they end up being about refurbishment or general maintenance. We have not come forward with any new major proposals for sites or otherwise in over ten years. It is probably even more than ten, from my recollection. It is quite frustrating. I understand the frustration of the residents. I visited Labre Park with the committee just over a year ago. We

were promised at that time that there was going to be a community centre but now the whole plan has all but been dropped.

We have to do things better. Dublin City Council is telling us the engineers have looked at things and that it is going to cost so much to deal with the flood plain and the various issues and then to provide housing. There are many people living in the area. I thought there were around 260 there, including women and children. We have to take them into account. It should not be purely down to money; it should be down to taking into account the concerns of the people and the conditions they are living in. We can restore bays and the like but there is no statement that environmental matters are going to be dealt with when restoration happens.

Like the residents over the years, I am very frustrated regarding the future of some of these sites. Many of them have been built around dumps. It seems to have been a pattern in Dublin City Council's area and elsewhere in the country. Down in Limerick, it is the same thing: the sites are beside dumps. People are expected to live with the threats posed by the dumps, whether from gases, leachate or other things. They are left sitting there and there are no major moves to deal with the actual problems around the sites themselves. I am just curious as to what communications have been had with the Department of the environment and its Minister to say we need funding to deal with these things. We should not be coming along here and asking about funding for housing. It should be a given that we look for housing. All the other works should have been done over the years. I am just curious about it.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Again, they are all fair and legitimate points and fair questions. They do not reflect well on us as a council. I will pick up on some of those responses. We have four other capital housing projects under way at the moment. There is a site in Cara Park where there are nine houses, Avila Park with three houses, Reuben Street with one and-----

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Avila Park is going now for many years.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: We have planning and State funding approval for that. We are in the process of a contractor appointment for those. These have been going on for far too long. There are other capital projects under way. We are in a contractor appointment process for Cara Park and Avila Park. We would hope that both of those are moving forward to see delivery on site very soon, and Reuben Street similarly. Camac Park is at an earlier stage in the process. We had hoped that Labre Park would have been a large level of new build housing, which would have demonstrated the council's commitment to new builds. It is really disappointing that it is not. In addition to those capital projects that are under way, we have identified a site already in the north of the city to accommodate new Traveller accommodation within a scheme that we are well advanced in our design of. We have not gone for planning yet. That will be a dedicated and culturally appropriate Traveller accommodation incorporated within a large new housing scheme that we are bringing forward. That is a change that we made quite recently. We should have made that a long time ago, but we have done it. Ultimately, that will come out and work its way through the planning process in the coming months or so. We are also doing a site search in the south of the city and have identified a number of sites with the potential to accommodate dedicated new Traveller accommodation within that. I appreciate that people will say that they have heard all of this before. That is a legitimate response to that point.

Regarding the remediation on the site, as part of part A of the planning application that we ultimately did not submit, we included a cost of about €3.5 million for remediation works

within the areas where the housing was going. That was to take away and deal with excavation and that it was built on a landfill, etc. There was €3.5 million of works incorporated into that. In addition to that, there were several elements of what we thought were appropriate flood mitigation measures like a flood wall, raising certain levels and increasing the size. All of those measures were included as well. I do not have a specific cost for that amount of works.

We have now since gone and spoken to the Department. As far as we are aware, there is no agreement in place with any Department on remediation funding to deal with the landfill there. However, we have now approached the Department and early discussions are under way about funding to do works associated with that. That is at a very early stage. I am not aware of any funding commitment that was given, but I have been in the role for about a year and a half. If there is something previous to that, we would be very happy to hear about it, but none of us are aware of it. That is not to say that there were not historic discussions on that.

Regarding the gas emissions, the radon membranes and what is required for that, as part of the 12 new builds that had originally been proposed, we had planned to include a membrane to manage that within the 12 new builds. What we have committed to as part of the Part 8 was that further survey works were needed for the current 18 homes to determine exactly what was at issue and what measures would be required. Those surveys had not been done in those homes at that time to determine what membrane or whatever - I am not an engineer - would be required. We are still fully committed to that. I appreciate that it is not in the note. It has been raised with us previously. As part of the report we are coming out with, we are putting in the timelines, etc., to carry out all those additional surveys. That is in there to explore and determine what measures need to be delivered in those 18 homes.

On the community centre, the Deputy is right. Regarding the more detailed flood risk assessment that we are now starting on, part of that question is if a community centre can be delivered. While the flooding team has raised significant concerns about the housing, a community centre is much less of a risky building to put into a flood zone A area. Could a community centre be delivered there or part of the site as flood zone B? It is not off the table, but we have to get to bottom of that detailed flood risk assessment to be able to determine if a community centre can go forward. Does Ms Walsh wish to answer any of the questions around St. Joseph's, St. Mary's or St. Margaret's?

Ms June Walsh: In relation to St. Joseph's, in 2025, six of the bays were upgraded. All of the trailers were directly connected to the foul sewer system. Any electrical and day house works that were needed to be done were completed. In St. Mary's, we returned one void to stock, and it was a long-term void as far as I am aware, before my time, and that has housed a family. We also have two new bays there. Regarding the laneway, Dunsink Lane, it is not in Dublin City Council's remit.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I know that.

Ms June Walsh: Our caretakers remove dumping where feasible and possible. We link in with our counterparts in Fingal County Council and its waste enforcement. An email only went out to it on Monday or Tuesday in relation to that. I am scheduled to meet with Fingal County Council to look at what is going on around the Dunsink Lane area and do a collaborative approach on it.

Regarding St. Margaret's, I am aware of the issues that are going on there at the moment. Over the past couple of months, we have carried out some upgrade works. Public lighting has been finalised today. They are there this week filling in and repairing footways and roadways. We have reinstated the green space. Grass is being done today. We removed illegal dumping. We are liaising with relevant statutory bodies, public representatives and residents in the area. We are hoping to have a clearer picture towards mid-June or the end of June in relation to the bays there and progress that project.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: There are a lot of apartments planned on the sites next to Labre Park. Do we get any contribution from them that could go into that? Is there any mechanism that we could look for funding? We get levies and all of this from all the apartments. Is there any way that we can get commitments to get some money towards helping to do Labre Park? Can we get commitment to give a site? Is that possible within that scheme or are we ruled out of getting a site there?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: On the development levies piece, the councillors are currently reviewing our development levy scheme. That is due to go back to them in the next month for agreement. As part of that, it talks about the amount of funding that development generates and where that gets allocated. That is a matter for our councillors, that is being considered and it will go to the full council in June or July this year. It might be one to take away and raise with them. Ultimately, what happens is that development levy gets raised and allocated against roads, community, lighting or whatever. All of that-----

An Cathaoirleach: Is it within the curtilage of the development plan?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: No. It is within the city. The development levy raised-----

An Cathaoirleach: At the minute as it stands, it cannot be specifically ring-fenced for-----

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I am not asking for it to be specifically because it would be too much.

An Cathaoirleach: Development levies cannot be ring-fenced.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I am saying, can some-----

Mr. Mick Mulhern: It cannot be ring-fenced *per se,* but it can be allocated to the provision of community space, which then informs the capital programme.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: While the community centre is one thing, it is within the same vicinity, whether one can access-----

An Cathaoirleach: We need to move on.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: That is okay.

An Cathaoirleach: Does Mr. Mulhern very briefly answer the second question?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: On the second question in terms of plans, the Kylemore master plan is currently going through its process. Other councillors have raised that process and our planning team are actively considering that exact issue at the moment about the identification of land for Travellers. That is due to go back to the council, sometime in June or July. The councillors will make a decision on the Kylemore master plan. That is running through its own statutory process and will be with the councillors for decision.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: I thank the witnesses for the information and questions and answers. In relation to the 18 and 20 houses, we are happy they are not in the flood zone, so they are not exposed to flooding.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: They are the existing houses.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: Yes. They are not in a flood-----

Mr. Mick Mulhern: They are in a flood zone but they are existing houses. Houses that were built prior to this are existing houses and we do not demolish existing houses. All the time throughout the country, as understanding of flooding improves and the modelling gets better, houses are identified as being in a flood zone.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: The reason I am asking is because they are not exposed in terms of the assessment of a new development but are they considered in terms of whatever needs to be done for the 18 plus two?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: We have confirmed all of this with our flooding team. There is refurbishment and upgrading of these existing homes, and the two that are damaged are outside of any of these issues. We do not need to secure planning permission for these.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: Does anything need to be done on flooding to protect the 18 plus two? This is what I am getting at.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: This is something we can look at as part of the detail on flooding.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: The local authority will examine that, which is great. With regard to the 18 plus two, it is worthwhile doing the work being spoken about to secure, develop and provide what is needed. Will the people have to decant for this work? How will this be managed?

Mr. Stephen Wearen: It was not the plan to decant but we might be looking at slightly more work on the houses now with regard to gas membranes depending on the testing results. We will have to see.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: The local authority is hoping it will be able to keep the residents in place.

Mr. Stephen Wearen: A lot of the work taking place will be within a very short period.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: I was on the council's corporate policy group in 2018 and 2019. I remember the issue being discussed and it got a lot of attention at the time. I accept the bona fides of the flood unit. It has to consider flood protection, and there are issues of livelihoods. People building on flood plains is a huge problem and I accept this 100%. With regard to the timeframe laid out for CFRAMS, the CFRAM work happened in 2020 and the development plan was passed in 2022 for 2022 to 2028. What has happened since then seems to have moved quite slowly. I imagine that all of the information was available then. It seems to have moved quite slowly in terms of making progress. Do the witnesses have any comment on this? Why did it move so slowly beyond 2022?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Clúid AHB was working on the plans at that point and it appointed a design team and engineering consultants to progress the plan. It was moving slowly and, in

agreement with Clúid, we took the project back from it. Mr. Wearen was appointed to it two years ago. The reports prepared by the engineers that Clúid had appointed were conscious of the new development plan and the updated modelling. They had referred to all of this and had set out a package of measures. As they were coming from the engineering team, we felt, in our review of it, that they were satisfactory to address the concerns raised by our flooding team, but this was not to be the case. I do not think we can excuse the two and a half years it took us from when the new development plan came in to when we were ready to commence our pre-Part 8 discussions.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: The mood music around where we are now does not seem very positive. It feels like there is a substantial job of work to be done on flood zone A and building something new there. It is probably infrastructural and there is obviously risk. Am I reading this wrong? From what I hear from the witnesses, it would be very substantial, if at all achievable, to get something done that is safe for residents and for people living there. Am I reading this wrong?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: It is a big challenge. Certain aspects of it will be a big challenge but there may be things that are possible.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: As in the community centre or things like that?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: The community centre, bays and other building types that could be delivered. We will look at a full spectrum. Deputy Ó Muirí is right about the challenge of coming back and being able to deliver the 12 homes we had originally proposed without sizeable interventions, such as the Camac flood alleviation scheme. It will be a big challenge. We can do some things in advance of the Camac flood alleviation scheme but I cannot clarify what they will look like. Deputy Ó Muirí is right that it will be a challenge.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: It is very important that people are kept up to speed on what is happening and where the local authority is going with its plans. There is disappointment and people feel let down.

The committee discussed the freedom of information request before the witnesses came in. The committee is interested in seeing the response to it and having it here. I know the local authority will have to get agreement but I do not think there will be an issue with getting that agreement.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Once we release the information to the person who has requested it, they can share it with whoever they want.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: I would like to see it come from the city council to us.

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Subject to the agreement of the person who has made the freedom of information request, we do not have a problem with it.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: I thank Mr. Mulhern.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: The witnesses before the committee earlier informed us that redevelopment had been an objective in six Traveller accommodation programmes. When the local authority goes back to the Department with its Traveller accommodation programme, what feedback is there in terms of accountability for the delivery of the housing objectives in it?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: Councillors ask us the same questions that have been asked today about why we have been putting a lot of effort into the more than four Labre Park capital projects we have been progressing. In our review these are a good step towards it but, at the same time, we had committed to looking at and identifying alternative sites throughout the city. We are now actively working on one and we are well progressed on trying to narrow down and identify a site in the southern part of the city. Between new sites, the five capital projects identified in our TAP, upgrades, bringing back into use unused or unfurbished bays and housing allocations, at that point we were able to set out a pipeline of housing between allocations, new delivery and new sites. Councillors said that, historically, delivery has been terribly bad but what we were setting out would be a step in the right direction and asked us to please move along with it. Labre Park has had a significant impact on it.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: Am I right that the figures are 12 units and a community centre, or is it 28?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: It is 18 refurbishments plus 12 new and two additional deep retrofits where the roof has gone and there has been fire damage.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: With the CFRAM analysis and the revised flooding analysis, was it the case the information came late in the day just before the Part 8 submission? Should that work have been carried out as scoping at the outset before developing Part 8?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: The plan was adopted at the very end of December 2022. At that point the engineering consultants whom Clúid had appointed were very aware of it. They had developed a strategy to deal with it, which included very localised measures to address it. We were of the view that if our engineering consultants were telling us they were addressing the issues in the project in what they were proposing, it would go some way to addressing the points. On our side it was poorly managed in terms of not being able to foresee the challenges and deal with them. As I have said, I have sat down with the assistant chief on the issue of the flooding area and we have agreed a scope of what needs to go into this very specific study. The flooding team is sitting beside us in terms of moving this work forward.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: It is early to suggest it but are there integrated solutions that could be incorporated with hard engineering solutions in any proposal that might come forward?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: I do not want to prejudge the outcome of the study but ultimately the Camac flood alleviation scheme, which is a number of years away, is the bigger broader picture. One of the issues our flooding team has raised is that while we have identified measures on the site, be it a raised flood wall, raising the houses up or raising the road, and all of these measures are perfectly logical, it is worried that when these things are done, it pushes the water further downstream.

Ultimately, it is the role of the Camac flood alleviation scheme to be able to manage where all that water goes. As I said earlier, the challenges in front of us are significant and we need to get to the bottom of that study to find out what is possible.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: I have two more questions. In relation to the landfill, what volume of material is there? Has the option of removing the material from the site been given consideration?

Mr. Mick Mulhern: I do not have the information to hand about the level of remediation works that would be needed but we are working with our waste team on that. The waste team has approached the relevant Department to determine what remediation funding could be secured to do those works. That is at an early stage so I do not have more information at present.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: Is there gas monitoring and so forth on the site?

Mr. Stephen Wearen: No, not currently but that is one element of the further site investigations and surveys that will be carried out in the near future.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: I just want to make one point in relation to our visit to Dunsink Lane. I know there is joint responsibility between Fingal County Council and Dublin City Council but what I saw was absolutely sickening, to be truthful. I have never seen anything like it in my life. As Deputy Ellis has said, a channel of communication with the residents is critically important. There is an illegal encampment on the Fingal side that is using portaloos for sanitation. It is 2026 and what we witnessed is truly shocking. I urge the two local authorities to work together to resolve the immediate issues and the immediate requests of the residents but also to look at a long-term plan to address what are unacceptable living conditions for the families there. This committee will be writing to the two local authorities as well but I have to make that point here. We climbed over concrete barriers on the observatory side but they should not be there at all. The illegal dumping and everything else was shocking. We saw children coming in from school and I find it unacceptable in this day and age. I just have to say that. It is important that we put that on record here today.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank the witnesses for coming in. It is the aspiration of this committee that sites around the country like Dunsink and Labre Park, which are some of the longest established halting sites, are moved on. Talk about flooding risks and flood plains began in 2019. Prior to that, I served as a local authority councillor for many years and they were not on the agenda. There have been six iterations of Traveller accommodation plans and Labre Park has been abandoned on each one. We really need to make progress. Dublin City Council is one of the biggest councils in the country. It is the city council of our capital city. It should not be the biggest request in the world that Labre Park would be resolved, with a bit of ambition. To be fair, the witnesses have admitted the failings that have occurred over the years. Labre Park has been failed numerous times, not just on flooding but previous to that it was something else or some other issue. All of these plans have been shelved and the residents who have been living there for generations have effectively been abandoned.

Collectively, we need to look very seriously at where we take this. It is important that the flooding advisory team comes up with a resolution. I appreciate that the team has serious concerns but we need a resolution to move this along and to give the residents of Labre Park the dignity they deserve and should be afforded. It is essential and it is certainly this committee's aspiration that it will happen. We look forward to having the witnesses before us again with an update, following the hydraulic report and assessment. Let us find a solution. Let us not find the problem. We know what the problem is; let us find a solution. Too many times we see in this House and in councils across the country that there are lots of problem finders. We need to find problem solvers. That is what we want to see done in this regard. I appreciate that the witnesses are probably in the same boat as well. I thank them for their time and we look forward to engaging with them again in the future to bring this to fruition.

The joint committee adjourned at 2.55 p.m. until 6.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 10 June 2026.