

ADDRESS to OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS by Concerned Parents Group, Our Lady's Grove Primary School

Our Issue

The selloff of school lands at Our Lady's Grove Campus and other schools.

Our Situation

- We are a group of parents from Our Lady's Grove Primary School in Goatstown, Dublin 14.
- OLG campus consists of a public primary school, a public secondary school, and a not-for-profit pre-school and after-school. The school was founded by the Religious of Jesus and Mary, and has been at this location since 1963.
- Since 2006, the school land has been sold for development by the religious order. (See images in additional material to show how the green space is nearly gone.)
- Last year the remaining land was sold for €13 million.
- We are very concerned for our school and feel that a long-term strategy is required to ensure that the (currently) privately held lands are not sold off for development. Our main concerns are:
 - There is a lack of overall planning for an educational campus on this site involving secondary, primary, pre- and afterschool facilities.
 - The land is needed to enable future expansion of the schools with many new developments being built in and around the catchment area; where will these children go to school?
 - Sports facilities and open space are crucial for schools and the physical and mental health of children. This should not be only available to children attending private schools in Dublin.

Our Actions

1. We conducted a public campaign to retain some of the land (and the land around Clonkeen College) for the school via the DLR County Council

Institutional designation or rezoning of land

- The land attached to Our Lady's Grove schools was given zoning objective A in the 2016 Dun Laoghaire Rathdown (DLR) county development plan. This objective is – 'To protect and/ or improve residential amenity'. It was also designated Institutional land, which puts further constraints on how the land shall be used.

Following a large public meeting, an online petition and widespread media coverage, DLR county councillors debated 5 motions relating to zoning and protection of school lands relating to Our Lady's Grove and Clonkeen College Schools on 12th June 2017.

Result:

Although the DLR Councillors approved the motion to rezone to protect the lands, the DLR executive argued against it, as they felt it would leave them open to legal action from landowners.

BUT the Head of Planning was very clear that these lands could be protected under current zoning and Institutional designation **IF** the Department of Education highlighted the need for its protection, which they haven't done to date.

2. Concerned parents met with Minister Richard Bruton in May last year

The Minister did not consider that the reduction in green space was unusual for an urban

school. He also responded that they have a just in time approach to capital expenditure on schools and the future planning group in the department had decided there were sufficient school places in the area and no future expansion would be necessary.

However, this information has been contradicted by the DES in recent months with the announcements

- a) Due to demand, a new secondary school will be opening in the Stillorgan/Goatstown area in 2020
- b) Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Planning department has recently stated that the current footprint of the Primary school (0.75 hectares) is not in compliance with Department of Education and Skills guidelines of 1.04 hectares for a school with this number of pupils. And
- c) Funding will be given for three additional classrooms to Our Lady's Grove primary school from this year.

Conclusions

In Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown alone ninety five out of one hundred and five primary schools have lands zoned for residential purposes. City and nationwide this number will obviously be much higher. The lack of child-centered decision making and the consequences of this will be felt now and into the future on their development and well-being. The DES has the power to intervene so as to avoid a serious negative impact on the future of our educational system.

We recommend that:

- All zoning and planning applications for lands associated with, and bordering, schools should be examined by the Department of Education and Skills. If the DES says they are, or might be in the future, required by the schools, then the planners can protect these lands.
- In situations where public funding is spent on the rebuild or refurbishment of the school, the state should take equity in the facilities in return, translating to a corresponding commitment from the patron that a certain percentage of green space/ playing fields remain in use for the school and local community in perpetuity.
- The Department of Education could lay down conditions with the school patrons before any of their schools are enhanced in the future. Retrospective conditions should be considered also.

Thank-you for your consideration of this matter.

Additional Material:

- 1) Images of OLG campus
- 2) Full written submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills

1. Images of Our Lady's Grove Campus: Before and After Land Sale

Our Lady's Grove, Goatstown



2009



2018

5.4 acres sold for €13 million
Fast track planning sought for over
100 houses/apts

3 acres sold for €3 million
45 houses and apartment

No remaining
green space.

(Hockey pitch is to be
rotated 90 degrees,
which will remove the
last pocket of green
space.)

In Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown alone 95 out of 105 primary schools have lands zoned for residential purposes.