

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF KILCREGGAN

Kilcreggan Homes was the idea of John Kelsall, a social worker who went on to become a lecturer in social work at the University of Ulster. He then moved to Scotland and became the Director of Key Housing, a housing project for people with learning disabilities. His idea was to provide for relatively more able people as he had identified a need for accommodation for them. His vision was to respect and foster their individuality and to encourage them to live as independently as possible

In 1983 an informal meeting was convened by John Kelsall and his wife Pat at which Oliver Shanks, Consultant Psychiatrist, Muckamore Abbey Hospital was present in a voluntary capacity. The first formal meeting of Kilcreggan Homes was held on 13 August 1984.

Initially the plan was to create small developments of 3-4 flats with "warden supervision". Nih Housing Association was a partner from the start, the later amalgamated with other housing associations to become Oaklee Housing Association, our current partners. The project was prompted by the community care agenda pioneered in Sweden and in isolated parts of the United States. (Wolfensberger "Social Role Valorisation" 1983 [entry Wikipedia])

John Kelsall drafted a design brief for architects. It reads in part as follows:

- Each flat should be entirely self-contained with its own front door leading to the outside of the building. As far as possible each flat should be a visibly separate individual "home".
- Each flat should have easy rear access, direct or via a corridor, to the communal areas. No buzzer system would be required.
- The design should reflect the need to use buildings flexibly as our service or philosophy changes over time.
- Each single person should have his or her own bedroom.

The first plans were for three one person flats, three two person flats (one with a double bedroom) and one three person flat.

The intervening years were spent in securing Kilcreggan Homes' status as a Limited Company and Registered Charity and also in obtaining a site. Several sites were looked at and rejected, including Elizabeth Avenue which had first been mentioned as a possibility in 1985. However a double site was eventually obtained at Elizabeth Avenue. The first sod cut 1st June 1990 by Alderman James Brown. Building commenced shortly after this. First residents moved in on 27th August 1991. In spite of the layout mentioned, each person had their own bedroom. By then John Kelsall had left Northern Ireland and the project was under the chairmanship of Oliver Shanks

The official opening by Alderman William Haggan, Mayor of Carrickfergus, took place 18th February 1992.

Our third manager, Miriam Kelly, introduced the concept of Personal Centred Plans which were managed by Mr Alan Vincent. At the time this was a very innovative concept. She also initiated Supported (rather than independent) Living. Ms Kelly also started Kilcreggan Urban Farm on land adjacent to Kilcreggan, generously leased to us by Carrickfergus Council. This enabled tenants to have an alternative to attending a Day Centre. At this time too, Oaklee Housing assisted us to build 4 bungalows for the most able of our tenants to move on to. Kilcreggan also bought a semi-detached house across the road from the main site again to accommodate more able tenants.

Our fourth manager, Deborah Black, built on the principle of Supported Living which led to a visible improvement in the lives of the tenants in that they became noticeably more confident and able to participate in more fulfilling lives. A few of them obtained employment with the assistance of Triangle Housing Association. Mrs Black also initiated a much needed administrative structure to cope with increasing bureaucracy. She and Mr Ernie Spence computerised the company's accounts. She also kept the Urban Farm solvent by negotiating salaries for the staff employed there by getting NIHE to accept it as a communal area of Kilcreggan – an apparently unique achievement.