




The Flats are Coming Down: Yup the Flats!

A sociological exploration of everyday life in the Dolphin House flat complex.

Prepared by

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Executive Summary

This report presents a sociological study of everyday life in the Dolphin House flat complex during an extended and ongoing regeneration process. Using ethnographic methods, interviews and creative practice, the research documents how residents experience housing, community and regeneration in their daily lives. The study finds that Dolphin House is characterised by a strong, multi-generational community sustained through proximity, shared routines and long-standing social networks. These everyday rhythms provide residents with a sense of belonging, safety and mutual support, even in the context of significant material disadvantage and poor housing conditions. However, the research also shows that prolonged and uncertain regeneration processes have had a destabilising effect on everyday life. Delays, unclear timelines and repeated consultation without clear outcomes have produced ongoing stress, insecurity and a sense of powerlessness among residents. Regeneration is experienced not as a single event, but as a long-term condition of uncertainty that disrupts daily routines, family life and future planning. Moreover, this experience diverges from institutional commitments that regeneration is to be progressed in a reasonable timeline and that transition phases would be temporary and minimised. The absence of structured mechanisms to assess and mitigate the health and wellbeing impacts of regeneration is also notable. A key policy finding is that the absence of a formal tenant participation model in Irish housing policy limits residents' ability to influence decisions that directly affect their lives. Again, this arguably contrasts with institutional commitments and in particular that any decisions affecting the community have to be agreed by the community and Dublin City Council together at the Joint Regeneration Board suggesting that Dolphin House has benefited from strong community mobilisation and some meaningful consultation, participation has often lacked decision-making power and accountability. Where formal regeneration commitments emphasised partnership and joint decision-making, there is evidence of a gap between these commitments and residents' lived experience, with participation often operating at a consultative rather than decision-making level. This has contributed to mistrust and frustration over broken promises and stalled delivery. Social regeneration initiatives have played an important role in supporting residents and sustaining community life during regeneration. However, these initiatives have been constrained by limited resources, unclear mandates and weak integration with statutory services. Responsibility for managing the social impacts of regeneration has often fallen disproportionately on community organisations. Overall, the study concludes that regeneration policy must move beyond a narrow focus on physical delivery to address the social and temporal dimensions of housing change. Attending to everyday life and community rhythms is essential to delivering regeneration that is socially sustainable and just. Formally, the potential use of a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) would potentially allow for the systematic identification of risks associated with prolonged uncertainty, displacement, and poor living conditions. Finally, this study suggests that where regeneration cannot be delivered within a clear and reasonable timeframe, the findings raise the question of whether prolonged regeneration may produce harms that outweigh its intended benefits.

Summary policy implications

- Prolonged uncertainty during regeneration should be recognised as a form of social harm
- Tenant participation must be strengthened and formalised to move beyond consultation. This should include the re-establishment of binding co-decision mechanisms between residents and Dublin City Council, in line with earlier regeneration commitments and best practice guidance
- Social regeneration requires sustained funding and statutory support
- Existing community networks should be protected during rehousing and decanting
- Regeneration success should be measured by impacts on daily life, not only by delivery targets

Summary recommendations

1. Establish a statutory, rights-based tenant participation framework.
2. Improve transparency and communication around regeneration timelines. This should include clear, time-bound delivery schedules with accountability mechanisms where delays occur.
3. Properly resource and integrate social regeneration with statutory services.
4. Maintain housing standards throughout regeneration phases:
   Ensure sustained and adequately resourced maintenance of housing stock throughout regeneration, recognising that failure to do so contributes to deterioration and undermines resident wellbeing.
5. Use every day wellbeing and community stability as core evaluation measures.
   Introduce a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to be conducted alongside regeneration master planning to identify and mitigate risks to residents' physical and mental wellbeing.
6. Establish an independent inspection and enforcement mechanism for social housing standards, equivalent to that which exists in the private rented sector.
7. Strengthen tenancy support services to address complex needs and reduce the incidence of anti-social behaviour linked to unmet support requirements.

List of figures and tables

Abbreviations

AHB: Approved Housing Body
DHCDA: Dolphin House Community Development Association
DCC: Dublin City Council
DSCP: Dublin South City Partnership
LDA: Land Development Association

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Funding and Steering Group

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Steering Group principles and membership

Core features of this research were meaningful coproduction and deep community engagement. In this respect, a Steering Group was formed and informed by the principles of Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR). CBPR effectively involves partnering, or co-producing, research with a community organisation or group to develop, deliver and manage a research project (Health Service Executive Research and Development, 2021). Guided by the principles of CBPR, the Steering Group had input across the following key areas:

- Project management
- Rights and responsibilities
- Ethical issues
- Partner's expectations
- Roles and relationships
- Community training and participation
- Decision-making processes
- Project Details
- Practical matters
- Reward and recognition
- Feedback and review at the end of the project

(Adapted from Health Service Executive Research and Development, 2021)

Steering Group membership was made up of the following individuals:

1. Bobby McLoughlin: Project Manager, Dolphin House Community Development Association (at the time the research was conducted)
2. Dawn Slattery: Outreach Worker and Resident
3. Debbie Mulhall: Community Development Worker and Resident
4. Dr Paula Mayock: Associate Professor and Researcher, Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin
5. Manus Bree: Regeneration Coordinator
6. Pat Caffrey: Resident and Community Activist
7. Phyllis McGlynn: Resident and Community Activist

Introduction and background

Dolphin House and Park is a strong, neighbourly and proud community in Dublin's South Inner City. Built in 1957, the complex was originally made up of 392 flats in 6 blocks. While in recent years there has been some regeneration, it remains Dublin's largest public housing flat complex while also remaining one of Dublin's most disadvantaged areas. Generations of families live in Dolphin House and now, through the slow process of regeneration, people are being de-tenanted, buildings are emptying out and the flats are coming down. While Dolphin House remains standing, this research has sought to understand and document the rhythms of everyday life there, using ethnographic and arts-based creative techniques.

Dolphin House and Park: The creation of a community

A striking group of brutalist buildings, the Dolphin House flat complex lies just off the South Circular Road in Dublin's South Inner City between Dolphin's Barn and Rialto. They were constructed in 1957 and comprised 392 flats built to house the poorest of Dublin's residents, many of whom were former tenement dwellers. Dolphin House is Dublin's largest remaining public housing flat complex and is going through an ongoing regeneration project initiated by DCC with full demolition and regeneration originally scheduled to be completed by 2030 (Dublin City Council, 2021) and having since stalled. The regeneration of Dolphin House mirrors prior regeneration projects in Dublin where complexes with a character similar to Dolphin House have been demolished. For example, Fatima Mansions, also in Dublin's South Inner City, were built in 1949 and demolished between 2004 and 2007. Dolphin House was developed at a particular point in history to meet very pronounced housing needs as many of Dublin's poorer residents were living in substandard tenement accommodation in the inner city. In this respect, Dolphin House was developed to house the poor and working classes initially and this still very much remains the case in Dolphin House in 2026.

According to the Pobal (2024) Deprivation Index which uses census figures from 2022, the Dolphin House flat complex continues to be described as 'very disadvantaged'. In 2022, the outer half of the flat complex, that is, the three blocks nearest to the R110 road (see figure 1, the complex is split into two sections by Pobal) held a population of 315 people and included a lone parent ratio of 63.33 per cent, an age dependency ratio of 30.16 per cent, 34.78 per cent of residents held primary education only and male unemployment stood at 24.32 per cent with female unemployment at 21.13 per cent. In the inner section of the complex, that is, the two blocks nearest to Herberton Road (see figure 1), a population of 266 is recorded and this population encapsulates a lone parent ratio of 81.82 per cent, an age dependency ratio of 30.83 per cent, 24.41 per cent of residents held primary education only and male unemployment stood at 21.57 per cent with female unemployment at 13.58 per cent. Taking both sets of figures together as an indicator of entrenched disadvantage, the Dolphin House flat complex represents one of the most disadvantaged areas in Dublin city and in Ireland more broadly.

However, while this data is important to note, it ultimately provides a limited statistical picture and offers very little insight into the everyday lives of the interconnected families and communities that give life to Dolphin House. It is also important to note that

residents of Dolphin House in the main do not see themselves as 'disadvantaged' and that behind these figures, there are lives, stories, histories and generational knowledge of life in Dolphin House that cannot be accounted in statistics alone. This research has attempted to document these lives, stories and histories sociologically and in visual and creative mediums while it remains possible to do so and so that residents and community members can hopefully feel a sense of ownership of their stories, an ownership that official statistics potentially obfuscate. Moreover, as regeneration continues to impact everyday life in Dolphin House, how this is experienced by the residents is also something that should be attended to by researchers in order to 'see behind' the commonly accepted notion that regeneration is a positive thing and good for all people. With this in mind, over the course of a deep and immersed ethnography and using interviews and arts-based practices including painting and poetry, as well as photography and film, this research documented the lived experiences of some of the residents of Dolphin House focusing on what everyday life in the flat complex is and has been like and on how tenancy and regeneration is being experienced. The research included residents across a range of ages, genders, occupations and other facets of identity to offer a rich and nuanced record of the rhythms of everyday life in Dolphin House.

Mapping Dolphin House

Dolphin House is located in South Inner-City Dublin along the banks of the Grand Canal. Dolphin House has already undergone some regeneration. This is perhaps most evident through satellite photography, examples of which are stepped through below to give a sense of space and place. Firstly, for illustrative purposes and as a point of reference, figure 1 below shows a screengrab from Google Maps that shows road and place names. Dolphin House is visible in the approximate centre of this image, backing onto the Grand Canal, with the R110 road to right-hand side and the South Circular Road offering the only point of access for vehicles. Herberton Road, which runs down into Rialto and intersects with the South Circular Road can be seen on the left-hand side of the image.

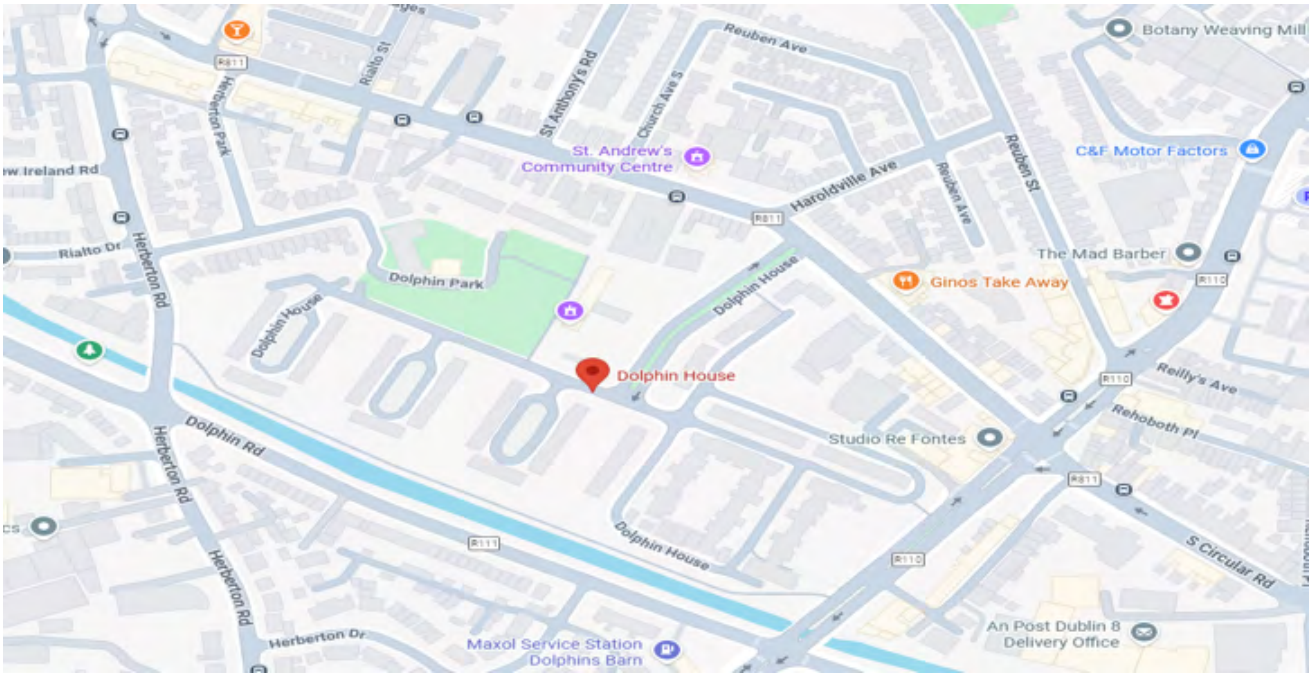

Figure 1

To begin tracking regeneration specifically, figure 2 below shows Dolphin House in 2003 before any works had taken place and comprising the five U shaped blocks which back onto the Grand Canal as shown in figure 1 and the long block, the first two blocks of which run parallel to the blocks nearest to the R110 road and the latter two blocks along with the corner block sit alongside the exit and entrance (known by locals as the sausage) to the South Circular Road:

Figure 2

Figure 3

In figure 3 above, a satellite shot from 2017, first phase regeneration is evident, and construction can be seen on the R110 side of the complex:

Contrast this with the image shown in figure 4 below which reflects 2019 and the progress in construction is apparent. Figure 4 also shows further changes as the former playing pitch at the top and centre of the image denotes construction of Dolphin Park, a purpose-built facility for older residents:

Figure 4

Finally, figure 5 below reflects 2024 and shows that part of the long block that once sat directly across from the now regenerated flats has been demolished as part of the plans for regeneration:

Figure 5

In terms of location, Dolphin House might well be described as 'prime real estate'. Situated in a desirable part of South-City Dublin, well serviced by public transport and surrounded by a host of local amenities, schools and hospitals, Dolphin House represents a public housing development in the middle of an area where property purchase and rental prices are almost continually climbing (Lyons, 2026). This positioning also reflects broader class dynamics, whereby a historically working-class public housing community is increasingly situated within an area of rising property values and affluence, intensifying pressures and perceptions of marginalisation. While the overarching purpose of this research is to consider everyday life in Dolphin House, it is important to note these external factors and their propensity to create and effect rhythms that impact on the residents of Dolphin House. For example, being able to avail of good public transport links is likely to have generally positive effects, parents in Dolphin House being able to access good schools is, again, likely to impact positively on daily life. Conversely, the same external things that introduce positive rhythms into everyday life can create external pressures as class dynamics in the area shift and as Dolphin House, a still disadvantaged area, becomes boxed in by increasing affluence, unaffordable rents and house prices, competition for school places and so on. While studying the impact of these broader forces is beyond the scope of this project, they are things which nevertheless have an impact on the texture of everyday life in Dolphin House.

The purpose of this research

Dolphin House represents a unique community in the heart of South Inner-City Dublin. It is also a community that was effectively created by state housing policy which sought to address housing needs using a particular model and at a particular point in history. For these reasons, the state and relevant actors owe a tremendous duty of care to the residents of Dolphin House and particularly in the context of plans for regeneration which, while they may be needed, will undoubtedly disrupt and otherwise deeply affect the everyday lives of the community in Dolphin House. This duty is reflected in the original regeneration commitments, which explicitly identified structural issues such as "sewage and damp" and committed to delivering high-quality replacement housing and infrastructure for existing residents (Dolphin House & Park Joint Regeneration Board, online, 2026). Moreover, this duty is particularly significant in light of findings by the European Committee of Social Rights (2017), which determined that Ireland had failed to ensure adequate housing standards in local authority housing, highlighting the State's obligations in relation to maintenance and habitability (see Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2017).

Dolphin House is a community that has changed and is changing and the likelihood is that what constitutes community and social life in Dolphin House now will be irrevocably changed over the next 10-20 years both through planned regeneration and broader social forces. For this reason, the primary goal of this research is to document and witness through the medium of the everyday. Sociological research that seeks to document unique communities holds deep importance, both as an intellectual endeavour and as a form of cultural preservation. Communities, whether defined by geography, shared identity, tradition, or practice, embody distinctive

ways of living that cannot be replicated once lost. By carefully recording stories, values, rituals, and struggles, sociologists create an archive of human experience that enriches our understanding of society as a whole. This kind of work is not only instrumental for informing policy, education, or cross-cultural dialogue but also valuable simply for its own sake. Every community, no matter how marginal or overlooked, reflects creativity, resilience, and meaning-making that deserves recognition. To document them is to affirm their place in the broader human narrative, ensuring that future generations inherit more than abstract theories or generalised data, but also the vivid particularities of lived experience. In this sense, such research is an act of respect and continuity, preserving the mosaic of human life for posterity while honouring the intrinsic worth of knowing and remembering. Everyday life is seen as the ideal unit of analysis in this respect and rhythms, that is the rhythms of daily life both good and bad, constitute the mode of analysis.

Research aims and objectives

The discrete aims and objectives of this research have been to:

- Develop a deep sociological understanding of the lived experience of residents of Dolphin House flat complex using photographs, sound files, video/film, drawing/painting and more
- Document the lives, stories and histories of some of the residents of Dolphin House
- Document the challenges associated with the regeneration of Dolphin House
- Develop an artifact or artifacts which may include a book, a book of photography, a short film or a combination of these
- Generate research data of relevance to the DHCDA and related support and advocacy groups

Remaining report outline

The remainder of this report is divided into four further chapters. The first of these is a brief and contextual literature review. From here, the study methods are described. Key findings are then introduced. This is followed by a concluding chapter which draws out some of the implications of the findings before finishing with some recommendations. This report forms one output from a study which fused traditional and creative social science methods. In this respect, there is much that is not covered here, and all research outputs, including a short film and an extensive gallery of photography, creative writing and art, can be viewed on the project website at: https://sites.google.com/view/yup-the-flats/home

Literature review

Introduction

The regeneration of Dolphin House must be located within the broader restructuring of Irish housing policy and the evolution of social housing governance over recent decades. Ireland's housing system has come to be characterised by high rates of home ownership and a comparatively modest social rental sector (Norris, 2017; Norris & Hayden, 2018; Hearne, 2020). During much of the twentieth century, local authorities played a central role in housing provision, constructing large-scale estates to meet urban demand (see Fahey [ed], 1999; O' Connell, 2007; O' Broin & McCann, 2025). However, from the 1980s onwards, policy progressively shifted toward market-led provision and the promotion of owner occupation (Fahey & Norris, 2011; Norris, 2017). Direct state construction declined, and housing policy increasingly relied upon private development supplemented by subsidies and income supports. One consequence of these changes was the residualisation of social housing (Fahey & Norris, 2011; Norris, 2017; Hearne, 2020). Over time, social housing became more tightly targeted toward households with the greatest economic and social need (Norris, 2017). Local authority estates were increasingly framed not as mainstream housing options but as concentrations of disadvantage requiring targeted intervention (Hearne, 2020). Within this context, regeneration emerged as both a physical and policy response, addressing ageing stock while simultaneously attempting to respond to broader narratives of social exclusion (see Fahey [ed], 1999; O' Connell, 2007). The financial crisis of 2008 intensified these trends. Capital investment in housing was sharply curtailed and subjected to rigorous central oversight (Brady & McManus, 2020; Hearne, 2020). In the period that followed, housing delivery operated within highly controlled fiscal frameworks and building projects were required to pass through multi-stage approval processes, detailed cost assessments, and sequential funding releases (Norris, 2017; Brady & McManus, 2020). Byrne & McArdle (2020) observe that post-crisis housing governance has been characterised by layered oversight and increasingly complex funding arrangements, reshaping the relationship between local authorities, central government and the private rental sector. These broad shifts in policy shape regeneration in both practical and temporal terms. While policy documents articulate ambitions for renewal and improved living standards (see Baptista et al., 2022), the implementation of regeneration projects unfolds within systems that regulate not only what is built, but when it is permitted to proceed.

Estate Regeneration and the Evolution of Policy Approaches

Estate regeneration policy in Ireland has developed through successive phases and Dolphin House has not been immune to this (see Community Action Network, 2018; 2021, Environment, Community and Local Government, 2014). Early urban renewal initiatives combined physical refurbishment with social inclusion measures, often under area-based programmes designed to address concentrated disadvantage (see Fahey [ed], 1999). These approaches assumed that improvements to the built environment would generate positive social spillovers. Over time, however, regeneration policy increasingly favoured comprehensive redevelopment, particularly in estates where

housing stock was considered structurally outdated or economically inefficient to maintain including in Dolphin House (see Dermody et al., 2014, see also Manzo & Grove, 2024). The rationale for demolition and rebuild strategies has frequently rested on arguments concerning density, design quality, energy efficiency, and long-term maintenance costs (Brady and McManus, 2020). Comprehensive redevelopment is presented as enabling planners to reconfigure estates to contemporary standards and integrate them more effectively within surrounding urban areas (Bisset, 2008). Such arguments frame demolition not as loss, but as opportunity. Yet broad critical scholarship highlights the social implications of this model. Lees, Slater and Wyly (2008) draw attention to the displacement dynamics often associated with redevelopment processes. Allen (2008) and Watt (2009) document the uncertainty, disruption, and psychological strain that can accompany long-term regeneration, particularly where demolition is announced well in advance of reconstruction. In such contexts, residents may inhabit environments that are simultaneously present homes and future redevelopment sites. Irish regeneration policy has sought to reconcile physical transformation with commitments to tenant consultation (Lima, 2024). However, participation frameworks often operate within predefined strategic boundaries (McInerney & Adshead, 2010, see also Bailey, Manzi & Simpson, 2015). In this respect, Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation remains useful in distinguishing between consultation and meaningful power-sharing. Purcell (2009) similarly emphasises that participatory mechanisms may coexist with continued institutional dominance. Tenant-led regeneration guidance emphasises that meaningful participation must go beyond consultation, stating that "consultation should not take place after the decision has been made" and that communities must have "decision-making powers" (Tenants First, 2007: 6). In the context of Dolphin House, these debates allow us to understand that decisions concerning whether demolition proceeds, the number of phases delivered, and the pace of implementation are typically shaped by fiscal, technical, and political considerations beyond residents' direct control. The demolition-versus-refurbishment debate therefore extends beyond technical feasibility; it raises questions about permanence, belonging, and authority in social housing governance. To give some sense of the protracted nature of this in a specific context, the policy frameworks, participatory commitments, and governance structures discussed above are summarised and operationalised in Table 1 in the context of Dolphin House.

Table 1: Community Action Table

Year	Regeneration Policy Context	Community Action	Regeneration Activity / Plans
2005	PPPs extended to 12 estates across Dublin	Residents entered discussions with DCC and local councilors regarding regeneration (Community Action Network, 2018).	
2007		In November 2007, the Dolphin House & Dolphin Park Joint Redevelopment Board (JRB) was established.	
2008	Property market crash and PPPs collapse	DHCDA started logging complaints regarding substandard living conditions.	
2009	Austerity Budgets and merger/closure of CDPs; major funding cuts	Dolphin Human Rights Campaign (RRIAG) starts. CAN worked with residents to compile evidence for poor conditions. 'Dolphin Decides' research launched showing strong demand for regeneration.	
2010	Austerity Budget; CDP funding cut from €75m to €67.5m	Samples of fungal flora in flats found 'far greater' than normal and health-threatening. Public hearings held as part of the Human Rights Campaign (2010–2014).	Talks about master plan (Oct 2010)

Year	Regeneration Policy Context	Community Action	Regeneration Activity / Plans
2011	National Regeneration Programme cut from €121m (2008) to €80m (2013)	Human Rights Campaign ongoing. Submission made to the UN Universal Periodic Review; ambassadors visit Dolphin House.	
2012	Austerity Budgets	Third monitoring hearing held on June 5th, 2012 on housing conditions; residents pursued rights to housing under UN Covenant.	Refurbishment takes place in Dolphin House
2013	Austerity Budgets; €25 million allocated to Phase 1 regeneration.	'Dolphin Decides Again' consultation reaffirmed residents' support (95% in favour).	Schematic Masterplan developed
2015			Expected start of Phase 1 construction (2 years to completion)
2016			Construction of Phase 1 began (Oct 2016, €20.9m)
2018			Phase 1 completed (Nov 2018); 43 homes for older persons built.
2019	DCC outlines proposal for revised Masterplan.	Residents move into new homes; Fold partnership completed Autumn 2019.	

Year	Regeneration Policy Context	Community Action	Regeneration Activity / Plans
2020	Completion of New Dolphin Park (delayed due to COVID-19).	Residents moved October 2020.	
2021	Housing For All allocates €1.2bn to urban regeneration.	73% of households participated in consultation; concerns adjusted in revised Masterplan.	Revised Masterplan published.
2022		Residents raise issues about demolition notice; DCC requested updated schedule (Facebook, Aug 2022).	Long block demolished.
2023			Regeneration Board provided Gantt chart for planning and completion (June 2023).
2024		Human Rights campaign launched against broken promises; evaluation of Phase 1 published.	Phase 1B: 30 homes under construction, completion mid-2024.
2025	Planning submitted for Phase 1b (Sept 2025).	Community garden and park completed (June 2025) while awaiting Phase 2.	
2026–2035	Phases 2a–3 planned; completion timeline 2026–2035. Approved Jan 2026; construction scheduled 2027–2029		Phased construction of blocks, park, and community centre; completion 2035.

Rights-Based Governance and the PANEL Framework

Building on the insights from the previous section, it can be argued that a complementary lens through which regeneration governance may be evaluated is provided by rights-based frameworks. In this respect, the PANEL model (Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and Equality, Empowerment, and Legality) has been adopted within housing and social policy contexts to assess the extent to which public authorities align practice with human rights principles (The Housing Agency, 2022, see also the Scottish Human Rights Commission, 2016). Rather than treating consultation as procedural compliance, the PANEL framework emphasises substantive engagement and institutional responsibility. Participation requires that individuals are meaningfully involved in decisions affecting their homes and communities. Accountability concerns the clarity with which decision-makers can be held responsible for timelines, commitments, and outcomes. Non-discrimination and equality demand that regeneration processes operate fairly and do not disproportionately disadvantage particular groups. Empowerment involves ensuring that residents have access to information and the capacity to influence decision-making. Legality grounds regeneration within established legal rights and statutory obligations. In long-term regeneration contexts, such as those experienced in Dolphin House, these principles acquire particular significance. Extended phasing, shifting timelines, and uncertainty regarding demolition or rehousing arrangements may test commitments to transparency and accountability. Where residents are required to wait for redevelopment over prolonged periods, questions arise regarding the distribution of power and the extent to which institutional actors remain answerable for delay. The PANEL model therefore provides an evaluative framework that is returned to in later sections of this report when analysing governance practices at Dolphin House. As the empirical chapters demonstrate, the relevance of these principles becomes particularly visible in the context of phased demolition, extended timelines, and uncertainty; dynamics that are central to the Dolphin House case. Mover, a model like the PANEL model finds familiarity in work done by groups like Tenants First who were very active in the 2000s and who made a number of interventions concerning what good regeneration practice should and could look like (see Tenants First 2006; Canal Community Partnership, 2007). In addition to rights-based governance frameworks, the potential application of a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) offers a complementary mechanism through which the health and wellbeing implications of regeneration could be assessed alongside physical planning processes (Institute for Public Health, 2021). In the absence of such tools, the social and psychological harms associated with prolonged regeneration timelines risk remaining unmeasured and insufficiently addressed.

Summary:

Governance, Phasing and the Temporal Structure of Regeneration

In summary, regeneration is frequently described in spatial terms, i.e. as renewal of buildings, redesign of layouts, upgrading of infrastructure and so on. However, it is equally shaped by governance structures that organise its timing. Post-crisis housing delivery in Ireland has involved strengthened central oversight of capital expenditure (Norris, 2017; Norris and Hayden, 2018; Hearne, 2020). In general, projects proceed through sequential approval gateways, including design review, cost validation, procurement processes, and funding release (Bisset, 2008). For the purposes

of this study, it should be noted that while such sequencing reflects institutional commitments to fiscal prudence and accountability, it also generates distinctive temporal effects. Phased delivery may stretch over many years as has been the case in Dolphin House. The interval between policy commitment and physical completion may therefore become a defining feature of lived experience and this is borne out in the empirical materials presented further on. Institutional time in regeneration is linear and milestone-driven, structured around project management frameworks and budget cycles. Lived time, by contrast, is biographical and cyclical. It encompasses family formation, ageing, employment trajectories, health changes, and daily routines. When institutional timelines shift or remain uncertain, residents' capacity to make long-term decisions may be constrained. The announcement of demolition or redevelopment may precede rebuilding by years, as has been the case in Dolphin House, embedding uncertainty within everyday life. In estates designated for comprehensive redevelopment, housing may remain occupied long after its future removal has been confirmed. The estate becomes liminal; both present and provisional, simultaneously home and site of anticipated change. Under such conditions, regeneration cannot be understood solely as a physical intervention. It operates as a form of temporal governance, structuring expectations, plans, and perceptions of permanence. Tenant-led analysis highlights that regeneration can involve "many years of difficult negotiations, disruption and living in the middle of a building site" (Tenants First, 2007: 4). This sits in tension with commitments that transition would be "temporary and as short as possible" in the context of Dolphin House (Dolphin House & Park Joint Regeneration Board, online, 2026). Dolphin House then, is situated within these intersecting policy and governance dynamics. Its regeneration reflects national housing strategies, centralised capital control, phased implementation, participatory frameworks, and rights-based commitments; located within a city undergoing significant housing pressure and development change, the estate has been the subject of regeneration planning over an extended period. These governance dynamics are further shaped by the limited autonomy of local authorities within Ireland's highly centralised housing system. Key decisions relating to funding, approvals, and delivery timelines are often determined at central government level, constraining the capacity of local authorities to respond flexibly to local conditions.

The history of Dolphin House regeneration therefore illustrates the intersection of national housing policy, centralised capital governance, and local residential life. It provides a case through which to examine how regeneration, as a policy instrument, operates not only spatially but temporally. This makes it ideal for the rhythm-analytical research approach which is sketched out in the next section. The empirical sections explore how these structural and policy frameworks are encountered and interpreted by residents, with particular attention to the rhythms of uncertainty, anticipation, and delay that characterise long-term regeneration. The case of Dolphin House therefore provides also a lens through which to examine how structural housing policy, demolition debates, participatory governance, and the principles encapsulated in the PANEL model are realised, or not, in practice.

Study methods

A constellation of methods

In order to develop a deep and nuanced understanding of everyday life in Dolphin House, this study deployed a range of methods that fused traditional social scientific approaches with creative practice. Within the context of a deep and immersed traditional ethnography, arts-based creative methods were used. This was to allow the research to access meaning making and insight through multiple forms of data. Moreover, introducing and using creative, arts-based, methods fosters multiple modes of inclusion (Whelan, 2024; 2025) so that residents of Dolphin House were able take part in the research in a variety of ways. The specificities of this range of methods are stepped through below.

Immersed ethnography

The methodological approach to this research has been couched in a deep and immersed ethnography of Dolphin House over a period of approximately 6 months. This has formed the overarching approach and in practice has involved the researcher being onsite at Dolphin House, getting involved in community activities, conducting and recording open ended interviews and talking to a range of people from residents to community workers across genders, ages and ethnicities while noting key observations and insights. Hammersley (2006: 4) describes ethnography as a:

> form of social and educational research that emphasises the importance of studying *at first hand* what people do and say in particular contexts. This usually involves fairly lengthy contact, through participant observation in relevant settings, and/or through relatively open-ended interviews designed to understand people's perspectives, perhaps complemented by the study of various sorts of document—official, publicly available, or personal.

Hammersley (2006) emphasises *first-hand* contact here and while ethnography as a broad method may have evolved to include less obviously first-hand approaches, such as digital ethnography, the ethnography engaged in for this study has relied deeply on first-hand social contact. Moreover, this study has extended Hammersley's (2006) note on what forms of data may usually be involved to include creative research practice. Photography as a form of documentation and data gathering has been a key facet of the study. In this respect, photography accompanied and complemented all other methods so that not only were the grounds of Dolphin House extensively photographed but also community events, events hosted by the research team and people such as interviewees and other residents. Creative practice also extended to hosting arts-based and creative writing workshops which generated talk data through the conversations participants engaged in and also through the pieces of art or writing they created.

Attention was also paid to Hammersley's (2006) emphasis on document types as way to ground interpersonal data and check practice against policy. In this respect, a genealogy of the activism that has taken place at Dolphin House across the years, coupled with a genealogy of periods of activity and inactivity by DCC has served to contextualise the data, observations and insights generated by the primary, interpersonal, research, the outcome of which forms the basis of the part of the policy and literature review chapter. Moreover, two 'key

informant' interviews were also conducted in order to further contextualise and ground the observations arrived at through both recorded interviews and conversations with residents while onsite. The first key informant interview was with a former resident, and this became an important focus for the researchers as the reality of what it would mean to be de-tenanted and have to leave Dolphin House came into stark relief during early observations, conversations and interviews. The second key informant interview was conducted with a senior figure in DCC with a responsibility for housing, and this became an important focus for the researchers as the uncertainties and unknowns concerning regeneration began to emerge from interviews and conversations as key to the experience of day-to-day life for residents of Dolphin House.

Use of these methods in tandem, or as a constellation of methods, has been iterative rather than sequential, with each informing and enhancing the other so that key themes developed out of observations and conversations which in turn informed the interviews and which in turn guided the analysis. Moreover, the creative workshops generated insights via conversations enabled through embodied doing and also tangible outcomes in the form of pieces of art or creative writing. These in turn informed further conversations, interviews and analysis so that a constellation of methods resulting in a constellation of data types came together to illuminate the following key themes:

- A strong and neighbourly community.
- Tenancy and maintenance.
- Regeneration.

Each of these key or overarching themes is made up of a number of subthemes and both themes and subthemes are presented in the findings chapter further on.

Interviews

Interviews formed a key component of the research resulting in the central plank of 'talk' data for the study. Participants who are residents of Dolphin House were recruited through the Dolphin House Community Development Association with assistance from the project Steering Group and also organically through day-to-day conversations that happened onsite. All residents agreed to have their first name used in the report for general observations, however, because Dolphin House represents a tightknit community and because some of what is stepped through in the qualitative reporting is quite sensitive, it was decided that names along with some personal details would be obscured for ethical reasons. Where interviewees mention other residents, pseudonyms are also employed.

As noted, there were also two interviews with key informants. A former resident of Dolphin House was recruited through an organic interaction that happened while the researcher was onsite during a community event. The second key informant, a senior figure in DCC with responsibility for housing, was recruited through direct email contact having been recommended by members of the Steering Group as a key figure with potential insight into regeneration plans for Dolphin House.

In line with the principles of ethnographic research, interviews for this study were open and conversational in the main. In real terms, after a period of rapport building, the researcher entered into a frank and open conversation with each participant. The exception to this was the interview with the key informant from DCC, where an interview schedule, drafted with input from Steering Group members, was used in order to elicit information about plans for regeneration along with tenancy and maintenance issues in Dolphin House.

Table 2: Participant detail table

Pseudonym	Gender and age	Civil status and occupation	Dependents	Years living in Dolphin House
Tom	Male, 65+	Single, Retired	No children	60+ years (since 1965)
Gary	Male, 35–45	Has partner, employed full-time.	2 under 18	35 years (all life)
Timmy	Male, 65+	Separated, does community work.	10 + over 18	All life
James	Male, 65+	Married, retired, receives pension.	1 over 18	37 years
Phillip	Male, 55-65	Separated, receives welfare payment.	5 children over 18	12 years
Terry	Male, 25–35	Has partner, employed full-time.	3 under 18	27 years
Stephen	Male, 25–35	Has partner, employed full-time.	No children	28 years
Charlotte	Female, 55–65	Widowed, Community worker	1 over 18	50+ years
Teresa	Female, 25-35	Single, employed full-time.	1 child under 18	29 years
Leah	Female, 25-35	Has partner, employed full-time.	2 under 18	35 years
Bernie	Female, 45-55	Married, employed full-time.	No children	21 years
Sophie	Female, 25-35	Single, employed full-time.	1 under 18	32 years
Key informants				
Pearl	Female, 65+	Retired, receiving state contributory pension.	2 over 18	40+ years (prior to moving out)
Senior Housing Official from DCC	Male	N/A	N/A	N/A

Creative practice

The creative practices utilised for this research included ongoing photography, the creation of a short film, two arts-based workshops and a creative writing workshop. The researchers were also able to tap into the creativity of the Dolphin House community in general. The specific use of photographic ethnography allowed for a visual corollary to the talk data gathered via interview. More than this however, the data, in the form of an extensive collection of photographs, represents a significant form of data in its own right that captures a visual representation of Dolphin House and the surrounding areas along with extensive capture of everyday life in Dolphin House during the summer of 2025.

Two arts-based workshops were facilitated as part of the research. A wide range of arts supplies were made available, and residents and others were invited to come along to the workshops and create a piece of art in the medium of their choice that spoke to life in Dolphin House. The workshops were facilitated as friendly and informal spaces. Participants were made up of both residents and people who were not residents of Dolphin House but who were interested in taking part in the workshops. These workshops produced tangible artifacts in the form of pieces of art along with insights generated through chat and conversation and noted by the researchers. Both workshops were hosted in the Dolphin House Community Centre.

Similarly, a creative writing workshop invited residents and others to come along and create a piece of writing that spoke to life in Dolphin House. Participants were provided with notebooks, pens and pencils and the workshop was facilitated by Tricia McGann, a former resident of Dolphin House and an accomplished creative, poet and playwright. This resulted in a collection of original pieces of creative writing along with insights generated through chat and conversation.
The research team also produced a short film. Filming took place at the annual Dolphin House end of summer family fun day and residents young and old were encouraged to answer the miracle question: if you could travel 10 years into the future, what would you hope life in Dolphin House would be like? This part of the study resulted in a tangible, professionally produced artefact that captures thoughts, feelings and moments in time.

Rhythm Analysis

Using a constellation of methods that fused traditional social science with creative practice has resulted in a mixture of data types. The central plank of data is the talk data generated by recorded interview and this was systematically and thematically analysed alongside and supported by the other forms of collected data. Focused on everyday life and informed by observations and conversations engaged in as part of the ethnographic fieldwork, and by the extant literature, interviews focused on:

- Lives, stories, histories and generational knowledge of life in Dolphin House
- Employment opportunities
- Family and community life
- Challenges and difficulties of living in Dolphin House
- Changes and life in the past
- Changes and life in the future
- Experiences of regeneration

Analysis of interview transcripts was enhanced and informed by the observational and creative data and was based on a form of rhythm analysis which seeks to capture textures of everyday life by using rhythm as an analytical tool to understand the intersection of social, spatial, and temporal elements in phenomena. In this respect, data was coded with attention to:

- Recurring actions, sequences, and timings within the data to understand how they shape social interactions and experiences.
- Focus on the interplay of time, space, and social relations. How the "rhythm" of places (in this case Dolphin House) are shaped by their design, location, and history.
- The body and its experience. Use of a "body-centred" approach, placing the body and its rhythms, emotions, and experiences at the centre of the analysis.

A visual representation of this coding process can be seen in figure 6:

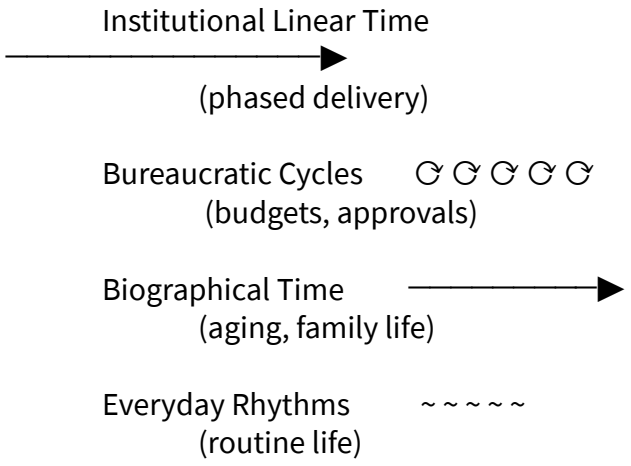

Figure 6: Rhythm coding framework

Use of this method of analysis has allowed for a rich and nuanced account of everyday life in Dolphin House to emerge and one which accounts for and reflects rhythms across linear time (as experienced through ongoing regeneration), the rhythm and social relations of the everyday (as life goes on) and embodied rhythms in Dolphin House (as being a resident of Dolphin House inscribes experiences on the bodies of residents). For the purpose of this report, the qualitative reporting which follows sticks closely to topline issues and to areas that are likely to be of benefit to the Dolphin House Community Development Association and therefore to the residents of Dolphin House. Rhythm is used here to frame the analysis, however, a deeper exposition of the data based on the rhythm analysis outlined above is planned for publication in the peer reviewed literature. In this respect, rhythms in what is explored further on operate in the main across textures of linear time which often appears as imposed time—a time that disciplines and structures everyday life (regeneration deadlines, phased decanting or de-tenanting, waiting lists, paperwork, inspections, the administrative authority of DCC as landlord, pressures of "move on," "apply here," "wait for next stage.") and as textures of cyclical time, a time that gives texture, belonging, and predictability, even amid deprivation (everyday routes, routines and occurrences in the flats, generations living in Dolphin House, cycles of care, dependency, local mutual aid, the rhythms and rituals of the courtyard, stairwells, balconies, local shops). Both come together to produce the rhythms of everyday life in Dolphin House. Where rhythms work well and are in-sync, this is described as eurhythmic and where conflicted, this is described as arrhythmic. This is summarised in visual form in figure 7:

Temporal Layer	Description	Examples in Dolphin House
Institutional Linear Time	Sequential, project-based, future-oriented	Approval stages, funding rounds, phased demolition
Bureaucratic Cyclical Time	Repeating administrative rhythms	Budget cycles, annual reviews, electoral terms
Biographical Time	Life-course progression	Aging, child-rearing, health decline
Everyday Rhythms	Routine, embodied patterns	School runs, neighbour interactions, seasonal use of space
Anticipatory Time	Expected but deferred futures	"When it starts", "when we move", "when it's finished"

Figure 7: A rhythm analytical framework

Limitations

This study reflects the perspectives of current residents. The experiences of former residents, applicants who declined offers, and housing officials are not extensively captured. Their inclusion may have produced a more differentiated account of regeneration in particular. Ethical approval to conduct this research was granted by the Social Research Ethics Committee of the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

Given the ethnographic depth of this study and the sensitivity of regeneration processes, it is important to situate the research in relation to the positionality of the researcher. Ethnographic work is never conducted from a neutral vantage point; rather, access, interpretation and representation are shaped by the researcher's social location, institutional affiliations and the relationships developed in the field. The researcher entered Dolphin House as an external academic researcher, not as a resident of the estate. This outsider status initially positioned the researcher as distinct from long-standing community networks and informal social infrastructures. Access was therefore gradual and relational, built over time through repeated presence, participation in community events, attendance at workshops and ongoing conversations with residents. Trust was neither assumed nor automatic; it was negotiated through consistency, transparency of purpose, and responsiveness to residents' concerns about how their accounts would be represented. At the same time, sustained engagement over the research period created a partial "insider" dynamic. Familiarity with residents' daily routines, shared references to local events, and repeated interactions meant that interviews and informal conversations often occurred within an atmosphere of recognition and continuity. This relational proximity facilitated richer accounts of everyday rhythms but also required ongoing reflexive attention to

boundaries, particularly in contexts where grievances about institutional actors were expressed. Throughout the research process, reflexivity was practised in three principal ways. First, fieldnotes included reflective commentary distinguishing between observed events and interpretive impressions. Second, themes were developed iteratively, returning to participants' words to avoid imposing an overly rigid analytical frame. Third, care was taken to avoid amplifying conflict narratives where they were not supported by multiple accounts. The aim was not to adjudicate disputes or validate particular positions, but to analyse how regeneration was experienced and narrated in temporal terms. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the presence of a researcher may itself alter rhythms, however subtly, by introducing moments of reflection, performance or strategic narration. The findings presented in this report therefore represent co-produced knowledge: shaped by residents' willingness to share their experiences, by institutional actors' openness to discussion, and by the interpretive lens of rhythm analysis adopted in this study.

Key Findings: Everyday life in Dolphin House

This chapter presents the findings derived from the ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and workshop engagements outlined in the previous section. The analysis was structured through a process of rhythm coding, in which fieldnotes, interview transcripts and observational material were examined for recurring temporal patterns in everyday life. Rather than coding solely for themes in a conventional topical sense (e.g. housing quality, safety, governance), the material was read for patterned repetitions, disruptions, synchronisations and breakdowns in daily life. In this way, the analysis foregrounds the temporal organisation of lived experience within Dolphin House. The central analytical distinction guiding the chapter is between eurhythmia and arrhythmia. Drawing on rhythm analysis, eurhythmia refers to the alignment of social, spatial and institutional rhythms in ways that produce stability, predictability and liveability in everyday life. Arrhythmia, by contrast, refers to disjunctions, frictions or clashes between rhythms; moments where institutional timetables, bureaucratic processes, redevelopment schedules or demographic changes unsettle established routines and social infrastructures. This distinction does not imply that one condition is wholly positive and the other wholly negative; rather, it provides a lens through which to examine how everyday life is experienced in practice. The themes that follow are organised in relation to this analytical frame. Some findings illustrate forms of eurhythmia, long-standing neighbourly relations, informal care networks, generational continuity and patterned use of shared spaces that sustain everyday life. Other findings demonstrate emerging or intensifying arrhythmias, uncertainty around timelines, allocation anxieties, disruptions to safety routines, and tensions surrounding demographic change. Several themes reveal a more complex interplay, where regeneration simultaneously produces stability for some residents and temporal dislocation for others. By mapping residents' accounts onto this eurhythmic/arrhythmic framework, the chapter seeks to move beyond a binary assessment of regeneration as either success or failure. Instead, it examines how redevelopment recalibrates the temporal ecology of the estate, altering the cadence of daily life, reshaping expectations of the future, and reconfiguring relationships between residents and governing institutions. The findings therefore illuminate regeneration not only as a spatial intervention, but as a reorganisation of lived time. In what follows, findings are presented as themes with each theme containing a number of subthemes. Select excerpts are used to illustrate the findings and are chosen for their representativeness across the data set.

Dolphin House: A strong and neighbourly community

Thrust together by policy and bounded by geography, the residents of Dolphin House form a strong and neighbourly community that has come to be defined by kinship, friendship, deep generational ties and a shared sense of identity rooted in these common bonds and manifested in solidarity. Some of this solidarity has been forged in the collective trauma of a community that was ravaged by the heroin epidemic of the 1980s and continues to face challenges with drug use and antisocial behaviour today:

> like with the drugs in the eighties and all that, you know. Horrendous. I have three brothers that died of it, younger than me. And what's going on today is nearly gonna be the same. A lot of drug pushing and the police do nothing about it [Timmy].

More of this solidarity has been forged by the continuing trauma of 'on again/off again' plans for regeneration and the precarity this has wrought; a precarity that clouds futures and undermines a fundamental context for general wellbeing, the surety of a safe, secure, home:

> Like we're not – like, as I said at many a meeting…the council treat people like pawns on a chess board: move them here, move them there; or 'You're going – you got an offer here, you got an offer there'. That's not where people want to go. People are not pawns on a chess board [Charlotte].

Coupled with this, poor conditions in Dolphin House have been an ongoing form of adversity. Through this adversity, and the solidarity it has fostered, and through the geography and landscape of Dolphin House, unique values, norms and customs have developed that speak to what it means to be from flats and from Dolphin House in particular so that the everyday life in Dolphin House may be said to possess and be characterised by an intangible culture denoted by a complex rhythm structure.

Identity and rhythms of everyday life

Through a combination of the shared trauma and adversity touched on above but also because of the unique built environment that Dolphin House comprises, a built environment that fosters proximity and effectively necessitates contact; unique values, customs and norms, often rooted in communal and reciprocal rhythms are apparent:

> You'd knock at the door for milk. You've Shaney upstairs now, he'd drop me down. If somebody gets too much of something – like me the other day. I got baps and wraps and everything off a friend of mine…and I dropped them up to Shaney.

Above Phillip, talks about neighbours sharing resources both as an everyday texture but also when a surplus appears denoting a conscious, communal rhythm. There is a universal human and social connection apparent in what Phillip describes but there is also a communal rhythm rooted in the geography of the flats 'I dropped them up to Shaney'. The effect of the geography and architecture of Dolphin House gives rise to customs, norms and rhythms that can be seen in myriad ways. For example, Tom talks about what it means to have neighbours who have a keen awareness of those around them:

> I live on me own, and if I don't pull the blinds up, say, around this time – you know, at lunch time…somebody will ring, or the neighbour will knock at the door: 'Is he dead or alive?', or 'You go in and see is he dead', you know.

Below Sophie suggests just how different living in a flat complex is from living in a house:

> I don't think you get what you get in a house, on a, like – on a road in a house what you do in flats, do you know what I mean? Like, you can probably see – you probably wouldn't see either side of your neighbours for days in a house, do you know what I mean? Where here, you're walking down

> the stairs and there might be three of your neighbours walking up, two walking down, and yous are chatting on the stairs then.

There are aspects of Sophie's suggestion here that reside in the unknown or in what she doesn't know but suspects to be the case: 'I don't think you get what you get in a house, on a, like – on a road in a house what you do in flats', but there is a way in which the geography of Dolphin emerges in her testimony as you walk on the stairs, pass your neighbours and chat. These kinds of rituals and routines, repeated again and again as a rhythm of daily life are part of what makes the community in Dolphin House unique, creating a type of eurhythmia or positive, cyclical, daily-life rhythm that solidifies and galvanises despite hardship and challenges. This is something that Terry also noted:

> Oh yeah, there's not a stage in the day where you go out on the balcony, just – maybe even if I'm working, I'll take five minutes, I'll go out on the balcony, and you're bound to talk to at least one or two people, or at least say hello to one or two people.

A further way the uniqueness of Dolphin House emerges is through the cyclical rhythms that characterise the calendar year in the form of customs and events. A good example of this is the summer project, which is organised for the children in the community each year. Below, Teresa talks about her own experiences of the summer project as a child:

> Like, we used to have a summer project. Yeah, we used to have to queue up – like, it's gas, cause we used to queue up to go on trips cause there'd only be like fourteen spaces. Now, obviously, all the kids get to go on the trips, which is good…

An annual tradition like the summer project, a key part of summer childhoods for generations living in Dolphin House, offers an example of something that is at once, a community custom and an activity that is likely to forge bonds and cement a strong sense of identity. The summer project and other centralised community resources like homework clubs, breakfast mornings, family fun days, art groups and many more have a provenance in the tacit acknowledgement that this is a community that has been traditionally under-served and therefore needs a range of interventions to build community capital and as a way to develop new life rhythms of daily life. Part of the effect of this has been the further solidification of customs and norms that characterise the community in ways that are unique. As Teresa says: 'Yeah, like, people that live in a house don't have a summer project for their kids…' and this speaks to community identity forged in longstanding traditions and to generational embeddedness.

Generational embeddedness

Built in 1957, a sense of deep, generational, embeddedness has come to characterise everyday life in Dolphin House for many residents. Dolphin House is therefore not just a place where people live, it is deeply interwoven with personal and familial heritage. People have of course moved out and moved on, however, many families with connections back to the original tenancies remain. This is an important point to consider in the context of what it means for daily life, and, once unpacked, it is also shown to be something unique. While it is perhaps not uncommon for people to refer to the fact that generations of their family have come from the same town, or city or even county as a matter of some pride or importance, denoting deep historical ties, what makes this type of claim unique in the context of Dolphin House is rooted, once again, in closeness, proximity and the built environment. Whereas people whose family

are from the same town are likely to be more dispersed, people who are generationally embedded in Dolphin House are together in tight proximity, they walk the same routes, climb the same stairwells, pass the same places, and see each other, often daily. Below, Terry, makes this precise distinction:

> Like, I think, obviously, if we were all living in housing estates, scattered all around different areas of the city – obviously, look, people have their lives, but it's nice to see – like, you just drop in on a whim, see your mam for ten minutes for a cup of tea…

Terry is someone whose family and whose partner's family are both from Dolphin House. Moreover, they now have children of their own thus extending the generational embeddedness. Building on this, Sophie gives a sense below of the complexity and interwoven nature of the generational embeddedness that textures daily life rhythms in Dolphin House:

> Like, there's three of us in here. Like, Selena, Lucy, the kids, me, and then my ma and my sister in the other block, my uncle Paul, me uncle Frankie's in the next block, then we have obviously Lucy's ma up there…

Moreover, this deep generational embeddedness is a powerful source of deep and embedded cyclical rhythm and in a particularly beautiful example of this, Charlotte links back to her grandmother, an original tenant of Dolphin House, and talks about the process of learning to count in a way that steps across generations:

> And isn't it gas, like, where I live now, I live – so, say me granny lived on the second balcony – she's well long gone now, but the flat I live in now is underneath where me granny lived…I remember – I learned how to count. Going up the steps of the flats, you'd be counting. Like, I remember me da would have me by the hand, and he'd be singing 'One, two, three, four'…That's how you learned to count. And because I live – and on the same stairway, I learned my daughter how to count; I used to do the same thing with her…And now I'm doing it with me granddaughter. Isn't it crazy?

This example of generational embeddedness illustrates both the depth and feeling of a sense of place that characterises the rhythms of daily life for some in Dolphin House while also conveying deep and embedded rhythms in the context of cyclical time. In doing so, a sense of just how unique generational embeddedness is in Dolphin House becomes apparent. This deep and embedded sense of place has often manifested in sense of safety for residents; despite the challenges they can encounter.

Safety and security

There are complex perspectives on safety and security in Dolphin House. On the one hand there is an abiding sense of safety and security for some. On the other, many people indicated that there are issues with security and that these issues texture their everyday lives, producing arrhythmia which can provoke anxiety, uncertainty and fear. In most instances, residents were able to both acknowledge the issues while still feeling relatively or even wholly safe. In term of safety and security problems, residents spoke of a variety of issues. Timmy talks about issues can manifest in benign but nevertheless frustrating ways through a destruction of community resources:

> Like we planted hedges out the front there, and in the last three weeks, we had to replant them about ten times. Just pulled them up out of the ground.

Leah talks about how trouble and antisocial behaviour often comes from outside Dolphin House to unsettle the community and introduce arrhythmia to everyday lives:

> People coming in from out[side] even kids: kids coming in from outside, causing trouble. Do you know what I mean?

More seriously, many of the research participants spoke about gang and drug related activity and the problems this creates. For example, Leah also talks trying the live peacefully in a community where both hearing and being in proximity to gunshots is a real possibility:

> We should be able to just live here peacefully and not have to worry about walking to the shops, someone letting off gunshots – We shouldn't have to worry about that.

And this type of activity is clearly linked to drug dealing activity in the flats, as per Bernie's testimony below where refers to people buying and selling drugs:

> The fucking candy shop. Because they come out to the door to you, you give your order, you give your money, and then they come back out with your drugs…they're getting the high; they're loving it; they've no problem selling it now; they've no problem doing the running now, because they have the money to buy the clobber and take the drugs.

This is an ongoing problem in the community and one which unfortunately has echoes in the past and recalls the heroin epidemic which so deeply scarred the community in the 1980s. These types of issues with safety and security sees the rhythms of daily life disrupted, producing a type of arrhythmia and causing incredible stress and anxiety for many of the residents some of whom live in close proximity to the activities so that they are unavoidably part of the landscape of their daily lives. It is also important to note that these types of security issues are not aberrations, they texture daily life and are as much a part of the rhythm of daily life as those more positive aspects of life in Dolphin House relayed in earlier paragraphs. There is also a criticism from some of the residents that these issues are not being adequately policed and that as long as these things are happening within the bounded geography of Dolphin House, they are likely to be ignored by the relevant authorities as denoted by Teresa:

> it's gone ridiculous with drugs… And you can see it like. And the police do nothing about it either. They don't care.

Policing issues and anti-social behaviour in Dolphin House are also something that the DCC is aware and as such, were addressed directly by the key informant from DCC during interview:

1 Housing Act 1966 (Section 62): Provides the framework for recovery of possession, though heavily modified by subsequent case law regarding tenants' rights.
Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1997 & 2014: Strengthened DCC's power to handle anti-social behaviour, including drug dealing and intimidation.
Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014: Introduced new, more detailed procedures for dealing with rent arrears and antisocial behaviour, ensuring compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

> But you know, it's very challenging for the council to manage criminal activity. And you know, there's security measures that probably can be enhanced within the block. I don't think we've got a solution for that. But ultimately, you know, issues around drug dealing – open drug dealing – which is what a lot of the local residents are legitimately concerned about, it's a very challenging one to manage. Like, that's criminal behaviour.

In this instance the role for DCC as a civic authority appears to be limited. However, where institutional actors emphasise the limits of their authority in addressing criminal and anti-social behaviour, residents' perspectives suggest a perception that available powers are not being fully utilised, particularly in cases involving tenancies linked to persistent anti-social activity and it should be noted the DCC does have powers to act in this context under the Housing Acts[1]. In the meantime, issues of safety arising from ongoing drug dealing and associated activities continue to affect the rhythm of the daily life for many of the residents. These concerns are compounded by a perceived lack of effective coordination between housing management and policing responses, contributing to a broader sense of institutional absence in addressing ongoing issues.

Yet, despite the clear safety and security issues stepped through above, almost all the research participants, both those spoken to at interview and over the course of the ethnography, talked about feeling safe in Dolphin House and this, again, denotes the complex nature of these issues. This sense of safety, like so many other things relayed by the residents speaks to the intangible nature of it means to be from Dolphin House and a good example of this is relayed by Stephen below who, though he does not like the closed in nature and bounded geography of Dolphin House on one level, feeling at times ghettoised by it, nevertheless feels immediately safe upon entering the grounds:

> I feel safe as soon as I get past either any entrance, whether it's this entrance or the front. I never feel – as soon as I'm past the gate, even though I hate coming into it, I feel safe straight away…I just feel like I'm in me sitting room. I just feel like I could walk in my jam– now, I wouldn't, but I feel like I could. I just feel safe…I think when people know who you are and you've lived here for so long, you just feel like everyone has your back.

This excerpt from Stephen evokes a familiar rhythm grounded in proximity and community; there is safety here, despite the fact that unsafe things also happen here. Stephen also couches this sense of immediate safety in idea of people 'having his back' and this suggests that everyday life in Dolphin House can see safety and security taking on the quality of a shared social good. Extending this idea, Gary talks about the how the community comes together to effectively manage safety, particularly in the context of children playing outdoors:

> it's safe to some extent; that everyone watches out for each other…You know, it's – I'd never fear for the children or, you know, going out down here and stuff like that….I'd know they'd always be – now, kids will be kids, but the parents and adults would always look out for each other –you know, and each other's kids. So, you know, I think you can't really beat that, like, sense of security in that form, you know.

Both Stephen and Gary sketch the safety that resides in a community where even though bad things happen, there is an overarching familiarity that comes from proximity and is

threaded through a built environment that at once enables some of the problematic behaviours while at the same time offering security. This denotes a complex rhythm field where both arrhythmia and eurhythmia reside in a shared context. To try to understand this, it can be suggested that the arrhythmic components of this complex symphony appear most prominently in linear, imposed, time; whether this is through a lack of policing or through a neglect of the built environment that allows dangerous activities to persist. Conversely, the eurhythmic components manifest through the cyclical time that underpins so much of the bonds of solidarity that characterise the community and this gives safety despite unsafe things happening. Both texture the everyday and impact the community collectively and the minds and bodies of individual community members. However, complex though this may be, it is complicated further through the fact that Dolphin House, acting somewhat like a microcosm of Dublin city and perhaps further afield, is not immune to the broader social changes in areas such as increased public and private housing need, increases in inward migration and others. When these changes meet with the strong and unique community of Dolphin House, with its own established rhythms manifesting in values customs and norms, they introduce complexity to the rhythm field and can produce unsettling forms of arrhythmia.

The challenges of change and integration

As noted, Dolphin House is not immune to broader societal trends and changes. In this respect, a challenge for Dolphin House and its residents is the challenge brought on through a need to accommodate change and integration in what is ultimately a public housing facility. Nevertheless, while the challenge may be one that is happening on a macro level, in the context of Dolphin House, it is arguably uniquely felt where it does present and so must be given careful consideration. As has been made clear, Dolphin House represents a unique community created by state housing policy and solidified by shared bonds and traumas. It is a multi-generational community built on bonds going back to the late 1950s. In some ways, it is by design and has become over time, a very self-contained community with its own complex rhythms. Therefore, any change introduced into a community like Dolphin House wherein proximity is inevitable and drives the rhythm of everyday life, is likely to be much more keenly felt than in other more disparate or dispersed communities. In at least some respects therefore, Dolphin House is the wrong community into which to introduce high levels of sudden change without also introducing much needed resources and presents particular challenges for accommodating rapid change. This is not because the people there are hostile or unwelcoming or incapable of adapting, but because the people there are already trying to manage a complex rhythm field and one that is underpinned by historical and contemporary neglect, mismanagement and mistreatment. It should also be noted that available flats in Dolphin House are an increasingly scarce resource, and this brings with it, a set of tensions in a community where people's parents and grandparents lived and where people wish to remain. Indeed, because the trauma of leaving Dolphin House asserted itself so regularly in interview and when talking to people generally, a former resident, Pearl, was interviewed as a key informant for the study and this interview made it even more apparent just what is at stake for longstanding residents of Dolphin House who are faced with the prospect of potentially leaving to take a house elsewhere:

> I never fully left it; do you know that kind of a way? This is just, as I say, I took this, but always me heart was in the flats.

It must be noted, finally, that while touched on below, issues around inward migration in particular are not something that animated the community to an exceedingly large degree, however they were present and so will be addressed here.

In addition to internal dynamics, broader demographic and policy shifts are also reshaping the social fabric of Dolphin House. As more and more people in general and from different backgrounds and cultures need to be publicly housed, Dolphin House and the Dolphin's Barn, Rialto and Dublin 8 and 12 areas more generally are undoubtedly going to be affected. As with any community there are mixed and often very strong views on this in Dolphin House and there are also fears and anxieties. In a statement that captures tensions around how international protection is being handled in Dublin, Phillip noted that:

> If they put an IPAS centre in there, I guarantee you it'd be burned out. I guarantee you it'd be burned out.

Phillip was talking here about a building not in but very near to Dolphin House about which rumours have persisted that an IPAS centre was going to be located. Moreover, in making this statement, Phillip was not suggesting he was in favour of such an action but rather was reflecting on some of the tensions in the community around this issue. There were others in the community with much stronger views in this context and with views in particular about who should and should not be getting offered flats in Dolphin House:

> And I'm sorry, I've said it from day one, the arrangements of the flats should be looked after in-house first before they're put up anywhere. They shouldn't be put up on the Choice Based Lettings if there is people in these flats that needs to move in to a bigger flat.

Here Bernie is referring to how when a dwelling becomes available for public letting, it is listed on a Choice Based Letting system where anyone who has been assessed as having a public housing need can bid on it. The dwelling is then allocated to the successful bidder on a housing need basis and not on the basis of familial or historical ties to an area. This means that someone from Dolphin House who bids on a flat there, may not necessarily get the flat and someone with no ties to Dolphin House may. This can create tension in the community, and this tension can become particularly pronounced for some where it is felt that potential new tenants are of particular races or ethnicities or may be generally disruptive:

> Because what happened last week was a disgrace…You had – how do I say it – Roma? Romanians? …looking at a brand new three-bedroom flat up there in the new build…And the residents weren't having it. There was two of them going up to look at it – a three bedroom – and there was about thirty of them, sitting in the field, waiting on them to come back to see if they were taking it…To be quite honest with you, they were chased out. And they will be chased out.

It is important to note that Bernie does not speak for all residents. Nevertheless, this represents an illustrative example of the tensions and disruptions that can be ignited in some sections of the community who, though they may ultimately be in a minority, have a strong sense of who should and who should not be accommodated in Dolphin House. While this is problematic, it is not perhaps surprising, given the sense of ownership the residents of Dolphin House have over their shared identity, that it could manifest for some in this way. Furthermore, it should be noted that many residents' concerns regarding new allocations are not objectively rooted in prejudice or in any way concerned with race and ethnicity but rather are often informed by prior experiences of problematic tenancies and this became apparent through conversations that took place over the course of the broader research and through the interviews. In this respect, a recurring concern among residents I spoke to relates to uncertainty regarding who will be allocated neighbouring units, reflecting both the scarcity of housing within the estate and a lack of trust in allocation processes and tenancy management. In this context, anxieties reflect both lived experience and a lack of confidence in institutional responses. Ultimately what this suggests is that any allocation of flats in Dolphin House needs to be handled carefully and sensitively; in a way that is attuned to the deep-rooted rhythms that characterise everyday life. On a deeper structural level, it suggests that the longstanding needs of the community in Dolphin House need to be attended to in tandem with a diversifying city and community. Moreover, it should be noted that where there was undoubtedly some fear, tension and anxiety in the form described above for some residents, there were also those who struck a distinctly welcoming note:

> There's so many – like, there is; there's so many good people here, and I think it's growing culturally as well in the place as well…there's foreign nationals moving in – as a whole, or even different countries or whatever it may be – are coming in, and they want to engrain themselves in the Dublin 8 culture or the Dublin 8 community, you'll always be welcomed, do you know what I mean?

In this excerpt, Terry is clear that diversity can be a good thing and that it can and ought to be welcomed. Terry therefore strikes a clear counterbalance and in doing so, once more gives a sense of the complexity of this area for residents of Dolphin House where openness to diversity coexists with concerns about the cumulative impact of social disadvantage within a single locality.

Tenancy and maintenance

While issues around tenancy, maintenance and regeneration in Dolphin House have been extensively documented and reported on elsewhere and over many years (Haran et al., 2023, O Connor, 2025), they nevertheless represent issues which texture everyday life, producing their own rhythms, and so will be covered here in that context. It is therefore important to note that this coverage stays firmly in the domain of the sociological, extending what has been conveyed so far to continue to offer a picture of everyday life in Dolphin House. It is important to make this distinction precisely because an extensive documentation of conditions in the flats is not offered here. Rather where conditions—or, further on, issues around regeneration—intrude into and impact the rhythms of daily life, they are accounted for. Approached in this way, the policy implications of a sociological research that focuses on the rhythms of

everyday life nevertheless becomes apparent. Moreover, the issues outlined in this section must also be understood within the context of the State's obligations to maintain adequate housing standards (see Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2017).

Issues with conditions in the flats

Many of the residents spoken to at interview or engaged with over the course of the broader ethnographic research spoke about the conditions of the flats. For some, these were relatively minor inconveniences at a personal level but even where this is the case, people are broadly aware of the conditions of others meaning that the language of poor conditions infected the rhythms of everyday life, becoming an inflection point, a communal or community level conversation and this again speaks to the relative uniqueness of life in Dolphin House where a conversation about poor housing conditions is as frequent and as mundane as a chat about the weather. For others, poor conditions have necessitated frequent moves, induced poor health and caused untold stress. Speaking once more to the effect of the built environment, flat conditions were also impactful in more subtle or indirect ways, for example, as some blocks are almost now fully de-tenanted, conditions in remaining flats become cold and the apparent emptiness of the near empty blocks attracts misuse, altering the rhythms of everyday lives for remaining tenants and changing the texture of places and spaces. Moreover, there is a strong perception among many of residents I spoke to that many of the issues now necessitating large-scale regeneration might have been mitigated, or avoided, through consistent and adequate maintenance by the local authority. Starting with this more subtle aspect of the effect of conditions, Charlotte talks about living in a block with few remaining tenants, the effects of this on daily life and of her frustration with DCC in this context:

> There's three of us left in it, but when one – one of the girls, which is me niece, is ready to go – she'll be gone in the next few weeks – it'll only leave two of us on that block…So out of forty-four units, that will leave – there's one girl down the end – that will leave just three people out of forty-four units in the flats on that block…You have no neighbours. You see nobody. You talk to nobody. It's a complete and utter disgrace the way Dublin City Council has left us.

Alongside the clear emotional impact of finding herself alone in a place where community and proximity were once the cornerstones of daily life, this has had a real material effect for Charlotte, affecting her ability to stay warm:

> the place was so cold. There's no one around; you're on your own…And even with me own heating on, sure, you may as well not have it on; you couldn't even feel it.

In a building that was constructed with fully occupied tenancies in mind, the slow emptying out of some blocks has caused unforeseen consequences as individual flats, no longer buffered by neighbours, become not only lonely and isolating but cold. Moreover, blocks that appear empty attract activities and behaviours that would not have been as present or as likely during times of full occupancy as Charlotte denotes in the following excerpt:

> You're taking medication to make yourself asleep cause you're afraid of what's on the stairs, you're afraid of coming in. Urine. They're – they're – wet– pissing on – excuse me language, but they're wetting on the stairs all nighttime, because the reason they're coming onto the stairs is because they think that nobody lives there…They

> think nobody lives on the block…And you get up the next morning and you're going out with your buckets of bleach. Where, when the neighbours were all there, no one would come on them…You know, this type of thing. And then at the same time, when you come out, you can't – you can't – sometimes you don't say anything to them cause you don't know what way their reaction they're going to give.

Earlier excerpts from Charlotte conveyed a sense of generational embeddedness as she recalled learning how to count and teaching her daughter and granddaughter to count going up and down the steps to her flat. However, de-tenanting in advance of planned regeneration has introduced new rhythms to life in Dolphin House for Charlotte as flats empty out so that those same steps now cause stress and trepidation and accentuate the isolation Charlotte is experiencing as one the few remaining tenants in her block. These experiences illustrate how regeneration, when combined with prolonged de-tenanting, can actively deteriorate living conditions for remaining residents, compounding rather than alleviating housing-related hardship. Earlier, it was noted that conditions in the flats affect the rhythm of daily life in sustained and insidious ways through being an ongoing and community level conversation and the excerpt below provides an example of this:

> I think there's only one or two people left living over in that block where it's all going on, and there's a girl over there that actually works in the fucking community centre and she's over there…And anything could happen to that girl.

Bernie, who lives at the other end of Dolphin House, is talking here about Charlotte and is aware of both her isolation and the challenges she is facing because of it, denoting how the stories of poor conditions in the flats have burrowed into a community that have had to face poor conditions collectively and for some time. Bernie herself is someone that has been on the very sharp end of poor conditions in Dolphin House, resulting in several moves and in living with conditions that are clearly unacceptable:

> It got to the stage the dampness was that bad I couldn't shower. There was little, tiny beetles running along me ceiling. They were in me toothbrush; they were in me soap. I couldn't shower. Me and me husband used to have to go down to me ma, or up to me da. Now, lucky enough, me ma lives in the flats as well. So I used to have to go down to me ma after work, to have a shower, and same with me husband; or if me ma was gone out, I'd go up to me da's in Crumlin.

In a stark excerpt that clearly denotes how poor conditions in the flats introduce an arrhythmia characterised by stressful and health affecting rhythms in ways that deeply affect daily life, Bernie conveys not being able to do something as basic as showering in her own home due to dampness and infestation necessitating the need to leave her home and go elsewhere to observe basic hygiene. This inability to enjoy basic comforts in one's own home or indeed to enjoy one's own home in a general sense due to poor conditions was writ large across the data and featured continuously in everyday conversations during the research. Staying with Bernie, she went on to talk further about how conditions in her home disrupted the rhythm of her everyday life:

> Me and me husband were sitting in the sitting room, watching a film, and it was raining like this, and here I am, 'That rain sounds like it's on the inside of the flat, Cal'.

> But it wasn't. What was after happening: the rain was so bad; all the blockages came up through all the flats…Oh my God. You'd wanna see what came out of me toilet… Yeah. You'd wanna see what was coming up out of me sink; you'd wanna see what was coming out of me bath…Oh, it was horrendous, and it was all piss, urine – everything – crap. Everything that comes up your drain was coming up.

Bernie's experiences here was far from atypical and many of the residents' conveyed disruptions to everyday life, affecting their ability to enjoy their home and characterised by issues with drainage systems backing up, persistent dampness and generally unacceptable conditions both at interview and in conversations undertaken as part of the broader ethnographic research so that Sophie talks about how the damp affected both her and her daughter who has sensory issues:

> Because my little girl's getting very sick. Like, just – Yeah, she won't even get into the bath for me because it's that riddled with – like, my – that bathroom window is never closed because I can't, cause the smell of the damp like. And there's all these little flies because obviously they're getting attracted to the damp. And she won't get into the bath for me because – I don't know why it is with her, but she has a fear of animals. So, dogs, rabbits, cats – anything the moves, like.

Teresa talks about the dampness affecting her son's sleeping patterns and impacting on his health.

> well, now he doesn't actually sleep in his own room anymore; he sleeps in the room with me – because his room is – do you ever get into a bed and it feels damp? So, in the middle of the night when he's sleeping in it, the room'd be that cold, his bed'll feel like it's damp and he'd get out of his bed and come into me. So now I don't even put him in it. Yeah. I've had him nothing but – loads of times up in A and E over his chest.

And general conversations, not recorded as interviews, readily conveyed an abundance of similar experiences to the point where upon engaging people as researcher, most would almost immediately begin to talk about conditions in the flats, denoting the deeply embedded nature of these issues at a community level. In terms of the everyday lives of individuals, it is clear from both Sophie and Teresa's testimony above and from Bernie's before this that many are deeply affected so that rhythms of everyday are patterned by arrhythmia where even the enjoyment of basic human processes such as bathing, sleeping and breathing are disturbed, health affecting and embodied. It should be noted that, unlike tenants in the private rented sector, local authority tenants have limited mechanisms through which to enforce housing standards, the absence of an independent inspection regime further constrains residents' ability to secure timely improvements. Furthermore, the requirement for residents to pay increasing rents in the context of persistent maintenance failures further exacerbates frustration and undermines trust in the landlord-tenant relationship and this was apparent in many of the day-to-day conversations I had with residents and brings us to our next heading.

Dublin City Council as landlord

Having stepped through how conditions in Dolphin House affect everyday life at both a community level and in deeply personal ways, it is important to reiterate that Dolphin House is, ultimately, a public housing complex and falls under the responsibility of DCC in the context of maintenance and repairs. In this respect, the key informant from DCC who was interviewed as part of this research was clear that maintenance and repairs are taken seriously by DCC and are attended to in as timely a manner as possible in the context of limited resources and competing demands. To give context, the key informant from DCC is worth quoting at length here:

> if you think about Dublin City Council as a total entity – and we've got two hundred and twelve flat complexes across the city; eleven thousand homes in those flat complexes. We've got thirty thousand homes in total. 50% of our stock is over fifty-five years old now. A lot of those flat complexes, a lot of them have a kind of a build life of sixty-seventy years…we've got a lot of flat complexes that need a lot of work. That's – so that's an important piece of context. We spend – last year – or this year, sorry, we'll spent probably about a hundred and forty million on maintaining and upgrading our housing stock, and that goes across everything from all of our repair works to when we get a vacant unit, we have to go in and redo it up to the standard for housing rentals, and then doing proactive work to go in and fix our flat complex. It's nowhere near enough money to maintain the level of stock that we have. So, that is a really legitimate problem. So then, my role is, is to try and figure out, 'Well, how do we spend that and prioritise that funding across the piece?'. So, if we look at, say, the older buildings, which are identified for demolition, we will absolutely go in and deal with, you know, real health and safety issues there. We've gone and we've replaced doors, we've replaced windows, we're dealing with mould, dealing with flooding issues or, like, drainage issues, – putting in ventilation. But at the same time, what we're not – what we can't do in a place like those older stock for Dolphin's is go in and do large works to those buildings.

It is arguably clear from what is conveyed here that Dolphin House has fallen between two stools, entering a kind of 'pre-regeneration limbo' and that this has instigated a reluctance at an institutional level to engage in any substantial remedial works. On the one hand, people live in Dolphin House as it currently stands, and some are suffering in everyday life due to incredibly poor and often dangerous conditions. On the other hand, these homes are due to be demolished and so this arguably creates a reluctance to resource adequate repairs. Nevertheless, the DCC key informant does insist that maintenance and repairs do happen, although such activities were described as 'reactive maintenance' in a context of scarce resources and competing demands. While maintenance does occur, and during the research there was some clear evidence of this with DCC workers often visibly carrying out work onsite, many of those spoken to at interview or in general conversation felt left down and abandoned by DCC as conditions in the flats impacted the rhythms of their daily lives and this is summed up by Charlotte:

> Dublin City Council don't look after their estates, and this is – they neglect the estates, and this is what happens…No, they never do. No. No, they never do. We used to have an estate management office over there where you could go in, and things were done. I'm going back into the eighties, and there was more maintenance issues like, say, addressed back then than there is now.

Charlotte is clear here; maintenance has fallen off the agenda for DCC and this once again speaks to the pre-regeneration limbo that has come to characterise the rhythm of daily life in Dolphin House in recent years. This brings us onto the final theme to be unpacked here in the form of regeneration.

Rhythms of Regeneration

> They just don't care. And they just keep changing the regeneration plan [Bernie].

This statement from Bernie sums up the feelings evoked by regeneration for many of the residents who were engaged as part of this research. There are feelings of abandonment and there are clear feelings of uncertainty. Much like conditions in the flats, the topic of regeneration is ubiquitous and casts a long shadow over everyday life. It is on the tip of most people's tongues and the range of perspectives expressed convey the complexity of the topic as an idea that is set to become an eventual course of action. In the interim regeneration is something that residents live with like a sword of Damocles dangling over their heads, eroding surety and preventing long term planning thus directly impacting daily life. Before stepping through some of how regeneration affects the everyday lives of residents in Dolphin House, it is worth reiterating two things: firstly, state housing policy created the community in Dolphin House and, as shown here, through proximity, generational embeddedness and shared traumas and hardships, they have become a self-contained and unique community with shared values, customs and norms; secondly, whereas regeneration may be seen as a universally good thing by those who don't have to experience it firsthand, the reality for those who do is far more complex. With this in mind, there were mixed perspectives on how regeneration should proceed coupled with uncertainty about when and how it will proceed and some sense of this is conveyed below.

Tensions from previous rounds of regeneration

Regeneration is not new to Dolphin House; some regeneration has taken place already and this is worth dwelling on briefly for two reasons. Firstly, first phase regeneration in some ways represents a test case for how new and further regeneration might affect everyday life in Dolphin House. Secondly, first phase regeneration did and continues to have a seismic impact on everyday life in Dolphin House, creating tensions in the community and illustrating a dividing line between those who were given access to the newly refurbished and full newly built units and those who remained in the existing flats. Because first phase regeneration was clearly still a marker of considerable tension, many people engaged over the course of the research were reluctant to talk about it, concerned with being taken out of context or portrayed in a way that might create discomfort for them or for others.

As noted, there were clear issues around who got access to the flats as part of first phase regeneration as conveyed by Timmy:

> Yeah, well, people were giving out to each other, and when we had meetings, it was all, you know, people roaring at each other and all that, you know what I mean? There's people getting them that shouldn't have been getting them…Getting them before other people that should have having them first, you know.

This type of tension is almost inevitable over the course of a phased regeneration project where some people are given access to new, modern, homes and others continue to live in what are often poor conditions while they await same. However, during the research it became clear that this was felt very acutely and had a large impact at a community level in some sense dividing the community between those who were able to move into the first phase development and those who were in some senses 'left behind':

> Well, do you know what? The starting of the regeneration was a disgrace. The way they're after building the new builds. Like, when they went up and the playgrounds were put in for the kids that live in them flats, our kids weren't even allowed go into it. The parents wouldn't let the kids go into it…which I thought was very wrong because of the regenerations. That just like – that's just a whole new flat – that's like new flats.

Leah conveys a sense of just how acute and divisive first phase regeneration has sometimes felt for some, acting as a demarcation line and creating a division in a community that through proximity and generational embeddedness has traditionally been tightknit. Shared hardship has also been a wellspring for solidarity and a source of kinship. As some tenants appear to others to leave some of that hardship behind, while conditions remain poor and lives remain hard for many, this potentially erodes bonds forged through adversity. Undoubtedly this has impacted on everyday live both at the individual level and at a community level and this tallies with previous research conducted in Dolphin House (Haran et al., 2023). Conscious of the effect of previous rounds of regeneration, and of the possibility that further regeneration if not handled sensitively could exacerbate existing tensions in the community, Gary noted: *I fear that they'd break the community, you know?* This, in effect, sums up the challenge of regeneration for the community in Dolphin House and the challenge for those tasked with delivering regeneration to get it right or at least as right as possible. First phase regeneration has left a tired and partly fragmented community in its wake; therefore, subsequent phases need to be carefully calibrated to avoid doing any more harm than necessary in a community that has already faced significant trauma and hardship. A lesson here also, though perhaps learned too late in the context of Dolphin House, is that where regeneration timelines extend over prolonged and uncertain periods, the process itself may become a source of harm. In such cases, it raises the question of whether communities would be better served by alternative approaches if timely delivery cannot be guaranteed.

Mixed perspectives on how regeneration should proceed

While regeneration is set to go ahead, to be characterised by full demolition and redevelopment, there are mixed views in the community about what this should look like and consist of, and these are worth noting briefly as they are likely to affect how regeneration is received and may even prove to be a fault line for the community at a future point. There are some people who feel very strongly that first phase regeneration, characterised in part by demolition and replacement, was a mistake and that deep

refurbishment of existing blocks would have been better and would be better in the context of future regeneration:

> Shouldn't have touched them. All they should have done was – now, I know they said that they're this many – X amount of – years old, they have to go down; shouldn't have touched them. Should have came in, should have touched up the windows, could have gave people new kitchens, lick of paint…Touched them up; painted the outside of them. I don't know. But they didn't have to knock them down.

Sophie is clear here, understanding at one level that the existing blocks are old and in disrepair, but nevertheless feeling that they are not beyond salvaging and Sophie was not alone in conveying this perspective:

> And then they're saying now that they're building in front of these apartments on the field, – and they're gonna be higher, and – I was like, it's gonna be, like – it's gonna be weird looking. But like, I think I – yeah, I'd just love for them to leave the flats like this and just renovate them.

Referring first to Phase 1b, Teresa is concerned about how this phase of development will fit-in with what is already there. Ultimately, Teresa is in favour renovation. However, there are others in the community who feel that the old flats have to come down to be replaced and that anything else is not likely to resolve the issues residents have experienced and are experiencing:

> I'd say knocking all – see, they're saying about renovating them, but they're really renovating the inside. So, say if that wall over there has black mould, –they're putting plasterboard up over it. Basically, what needs to happen – like, all my life – I'm all my life in here…Like, they've sewage and you get smells up your sink, smells out of your washing machine. The piping that's coming from the roofs down – I mean, they're seventy years old now at the minute. When they were fifty years old, they were, they were earmarked for regeneration.

Charlotte is clear; the flats have needed to be regenerated for a long time now and conditions have only gotten worse since they were originally marked for regeneration. These competing or at least differing perspectives once again convey the complexity of regeneration as a topic within the community at Dolphin House.

Uncertainty and precarity about future regeneration

While there may be mixed views on how things should proceed, there are now, nevertheless, firm plans for full regeneration and redevelopment of Dolphin House, and these were stepped through in detail by the key informant from DCC and are worth conveying here:

> Where – what we're at, at the moment, is we're about to lodge planning application for the very – for the next, Phase 1B we call it, which is thirty homes out onto the main Dolphin Road, just in behind the recently refurbished and built units there. So that's Phase 1B…We've…started work on Phase 1C, which is about twenty additional homes up behind the fold housing scheme. So we've now got a team working on that

> internally. And again, we'll be briefing the councillors and the consultative forum on that more formally. We'll be starting that engagement next month. And that's a good news story as well about getting more housing delivery done…and then we're into the main meat and drink of the main site. Where we're at the moment for that is we've submitted our, what's called a Strategic Assessment Report, which is the first stage of your business case, and our social housing funding – first stage of our social housing funding application – down to the department. That's been with them now for two months – and ultimately, we need that approval in place, and then we'll be looking at our – we're – and in the background we're putting a full team together to be able to resource that. So, our hope is, is that we – our plan again is that, subject to approval from the department, we'd be looking to make our planning submission for that. So, that's – it's six hundred plus homes more – I can't remember exactly what it is now, but it's a planning application down to the board, and the plan for that submission will be kind of early 2027 for a planning application. Now, I'd need to double check. I could confirm all those dates for you, but broadly, that's where we're at.

Broadly speaking, the above outline sits at planning stage at time of writing with plans for Phase 1b to be commenced in the short to medium term (plans approved in Jan 2026 by DCC, works to commence in early 2027 with completion by 2029) followed by Phase 1c and then onto the largest phase of development. This development, if delivered, will mean an effective doubling of the number of units within the same geographic footprint substantially growing the community in Dolphin House. All the old blocks will come down and be replaced and the tenure mix will change to include cost rental properties alongside public housing. There are no plans to include private housing.

These changes will irrevocably alter the fabric of life in Dolphin House and impact of the rhythm of daily life before, during and after development. While undoubtedly a challenging undertaking for residents and council officials alike, the plans do also represent a roadmap and, potentially, a degree of certainty. However, despite efforts, these plans have not filtered down to the community fully meaning that uncertainty lingers and tempers the rhythms of everyday life in myriad ways. Moreover, plans for regeneration have been presented and have changed before and so there is understandably low trust among the community. Furthermore, those who do have a sense of the plans are not always in agreement with them. Focusing on general uncertainty first, below James, talking about regeneration, captures the contours of this and how perhaps uncertainty and misinformation make their way through the community:

> when is it gonna start again. I know they do have meetings, and I was involved in the meetings the last time, and they were a waste of time – meetings…And people didn't know what was going on. You'd meet one person: 'Yeah, so and so – like, they're regenerating that'… They didn't know. They didn't know where they stood.

Here James speaks to the ongoing issue of residents, quite aside from whether or not they are in favour of regeneration, simply not knowing where they stand or having their own ideas about what's set to happen. Again, this type of creeping uncertainty, an uncertainty characterised by not knowing whether or not your home will be demolished in the near or distant future, is unique to Dolphin House and similar public housing complexes who face these kinds of issues. This uncertainty creates tensions and has a negative net effect,

introducing arrhythmia into the community. This can range from not wanting regeneration to start because you've just gotten a new flat that you've put a lot of time and resources into like Gary:

> It would be a selfish kind of answer, but I hope it doesn't – nothing happens for a few years at least…I mean, probably five/six…But again, that's just because I'm after putting a lot into this.

To more entrenched perspectives characterised by the view that if even one person in the community opposes an aspect of regeneration, DCC will have a fight on their hands:

> the way they're coming back to speak to the people is wrong: 'Well, they're going up whether you like it or not'…So the back answer you're gonna get off everybody at Dolphin House: 'Well, they're not, because if we have to sleep out there, we'll sleep out there'…So they don't even communicate with the community right. 'It's our way or the highway'. But then they gonna have a battle on their hands, –and it's gonna take longer for regeneration. But if one goes out and sleeps out there, you're gonna have the whole four hundred and odd of us.

In the previous excerpt, Bernie is referring to Phase 1b which will be located on a thin strip of land in front of the previously regenerated Phase 1a. She notes how in her view communication from DCC can feel dictatorial and suggests that if regeneration is imposed and subsequently resisted by even one member of the community, this will bring the whole community out in protest. In a sense, Bernie conveys the deep tensions that exist around the topic of regeneration in Dolphin House along with the mixed perspectives at play. Yet despite the complexities and tensions stepped through above, Dolphin House also represents a community in which there is hope for the future. Regeneration—though it may ultimately prove impossible to bring everyone along—if handled sensitively and respectfully could represent a new and bright chapter for the community in Dolphin House and one that introduces new and positive rhythms to everyday life there. By considering the impact of regeneration at the level of everyday and by trying to avoid introducing disruptive and arrhythmic rhythms where possible, it may be possible to both keep the community at Dolphin House in-tact while also allowing it to change and grow to develop new positive rhythms to characterise everyday life.

This study set out to document everyday life in Dolphin House at a moment of profound transition. By placing everyday life at the centre of analysis and by using rhythm as a conceptual lens, the research has shown that Dolphin House is not merely a public housing site awaiting redevelopment, but a lived social world shaped by generations of shared history, proximity and care. Through a deep, immersed, ethnography, interviews and creative practice, this research has traced the rhythms that shape daily existence in the flats: rhythms of care, kinship and reciprocity; rhythms of waiting, uncertainty and imposed timelines; and rhythms of resistance, mobilisation and hope. In doing so, the research has shown that Dolphin House represents a densely textured social world produced through generations of shared life, hardship and collective action. The findings thereby demonstrate that everyday life in Dolphin House is organised through a dense and interwoven rhythm field. Cyclical rhythms of daily interaction—meeting neighbours on stairwells, watching over children, sharing food, participating in community projects—structure how residents experience belonging, safety and identity. These rhythms are reinforced by generational embeddedness, with families living in close proximity across decades, producing a continuity of social life that is both rare and fragile. In this sense, the built environment of the flats has not simply housed residents but has actively shaped the social relations, norms and values that define the community. At the same time, these cyclical, community-generated rhythms exist in persistent tension with linear, imposed rhythms associated with housing management and regeneration. Regeneration has been experienced by residents not as a clearly bounded process with a defined beginning and end, but as a prolonged condition of waiting, uncertainty and suspension. Delays, changing plans, unclear timelines and repeated consultations without clear outcomes have disrupted everyday routines and undermined residents' sense of control over their homes and futures. This temporal uncertainty constitutes a form of harm in itself, producing stress, anxiety and a pervasive sense of precarity that seeps into daily life.

The literature review undertaken here situates these experiences within a broader Irish housing context marked by ambitious regeneration rhetoric but weak structures for tenant participation and accountability. While policy rhetoric emphasises social inclusion and sustainable communities, the absence of a statutory, rights-based tenant participation model leaves residents vulnerable to tokenistic consultation and broken promises. In Dolphin House, decades of community mobilisation have secured important gains, including a right to return and partial delivery of new homes and amenities. However, the findings also demonstrate the limits of community capacity when participation is not underpinned by clear authority, adequate resourcing and meaningful power-sharing with statutory actors. Social regeneration emerges in this study as both essential and fragile. The work of the Dolphin House Community Development Association and related groups has played a crucial role in sustaining community life, supporting families and mitigating some of the harms associated with regeneration delays. Yet the research also shows how social regeneration has been constrained by unclear mandates, insufficient resources and weak integration with statutory services.

Without stronger institutional commitment, social regeneration risks remaining compensatory and short-term, rather than transformative.

The findings highlight a gap between the original regeneration commitments—centred on partnership, community sustainability, and rights—and the lived experience of residents, characterised by prolonged disruption, limited decision-making power, and ongoing housing challenges (Dolphin House & Park Joint Regeneration Board, online, 2026) Taken together, the findings point to a fundamental policy lesson: regeneration that focuses primarily on buildings, timelines and delivery targets, without fully accounting for the social rhythms of everyday life, risks undermining the very communities it claims to support. Dolphin House demonstrates that communities are not passive recipients of policy, but active social systems with histories, values and capacities that must be recognised as central to regeneration, not peripheral to it. Documenting everyday life in Dolphin House at this moment is therefore both an act of sociological witness and a contribution to policy learning. As the flats come down, what is at stake is not only housing stock, but a way of life produced through decades of shared experience. Attending to rhythm makes visible what is often overlooked: the slow, cumulative effects of uncertainty; the social value of proximity and continuity; and the importance of aligning policy timelines with the lived realities of those most affected.

Formal Longform Recommendations

Drawing directly from the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Establish a formal, rights-based tenant participation model**
   Regeneration and social housing policy in Ireland should adopt a statutory tenant participation framework, informed by PANEL principles, that goes beyond consultation to enable genuine influence over decisions affecting tenants' lives. This should include clear mechanisms for accountability, independent monitoring and remedies when commitments are not met.

2. **Provide clarity, transparency and realistic timelines in regeneration processes**
   Dublin City Council and relevant authorities should prioritise clear, honest communication with residents regarding regeneration timelines, funding stages and potential delays. Reducing uncertainty is itself a form of social support and is essential to safeguarding residents' wellbeing during long regeneration periods.

3. **Strengthen and properly resource social regeneration structures**
   Social regeneration must be recognised as a core, not ancillary, component of regeneration. This requires adequate, sustained funding for community organisations such as the DHCDA, clearer mandates for social regeneration groups, and formal involvement of statutory agencies to ensure alignment with health, education and social services.

4. **Recognise and protect existing community assets and social networks**
   Regeneration planning should explicitly account for the value of generational embeddedness, proximity-based support networks and shared community spaces. Decisions about decanting, rehousing and design should aim to preserve social ties wherever possible.

5. **Address ongoing tenancy, maintenance and safety concerns during regeneration**
   Living conditions in remaining flats must not be allowed to deteriorate further while residents wait for regeneration. Timely maintenance, clear landlord accountability and coordinated responses to safety concerns are essential to preventing further harm and loss of trust.

6. **Embed community-based knowledge in future regeneration policy and practice**
   The lived experience, historical memory and locally generated knowledge documented in this study and others should be treated as a legitimate evidence base for future decision-making in Dolphin House and similar communities.

In closing, this research affirms the importance of documenting everyday life at moments of transition. To reiterate, as the flats come down, what is at stake is not only housing stock, but a way of life shaped by shared rhythms, relationships and histories. Recognising, valuing and protecting these dimensions is essential if regeneration is to deliver not just new buildings, but more secure, just and liveable futures for the residents of Dolphin House. The experience of Dolphin House must also be understood within the broader context of class inequality and the residualisation of social housing. As public housing becomes increasingly targeted toward those with the greatest need, estates such as Dolphin House carry a disproportionate burden of social and economic disadvantage. These dynamics shape both lived experience and perceptions of regeneration, particularly in areas undergoing wider processes of urban change and rising affluence.

Appendices

Letter of Comfort from Dublin City Council

A. Letter of comfort

Dublin City Council and the Joint Dolphin Regeneration Board are committed to sustaining the community of Dolphin throughout and beyond the Regeneration. For that reason, Dublin City Council is sending residents who are helping to facilitate the Regeneration by temporarily moving from their homes this 'Letter of Comfort'.

- This letter guarantees that each resident will have the option to return to a newly built unit within Phase 2 when the regeneration of that phase is complete, subject to some conditions set out below.

- Disregard for rent payments or agreements to deal with arrears as well as breaches of tenancy agreements and engaging in criminal activity during the Transition period will stop your right to return. This includes alterations or damage to your interim property over and above normal wear and tear, which are identified in Dublin City Council inspections.

- While you are in interim accommodation, you will remain on the transfer list. If you qualify, you are free to move from your interim accommodation to a permanent home elsewhere, subject to normal housing allocation conditions, in which case we you will be no longer eligible for accommodation in any Phase in Dolphin. You must inform Dublin City Council and your landlord (if you become a tenant of a Housing Association) of your decision to move in advance.

- On return to Dolphin tenants currently in 3 bedroom units who do not need a 3-bedroom unit will be offered a minimum of a 2-bedroom unit and those in a 2-bedroom unit will also be offered a 2-bedroom unit. Where there is competition among residents for a specific unit within different phases, priority will be given to residents on the basis of:

    1. Having a clear rent account or their making arrears payments in accordance with an agreed payments schedule
    2. Adhering to Tenancy Agreements and a Good Estate Management Record and subject to Garda clearance vetting.
    3. Length of Tenancy with the Council.

- This letter of comfort will be issued to those residents who facilitate the building process by de-tenanting temporarily internally or externally, that they will be allocated a home as close as possible to where they originally lived in Dolphin House.

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