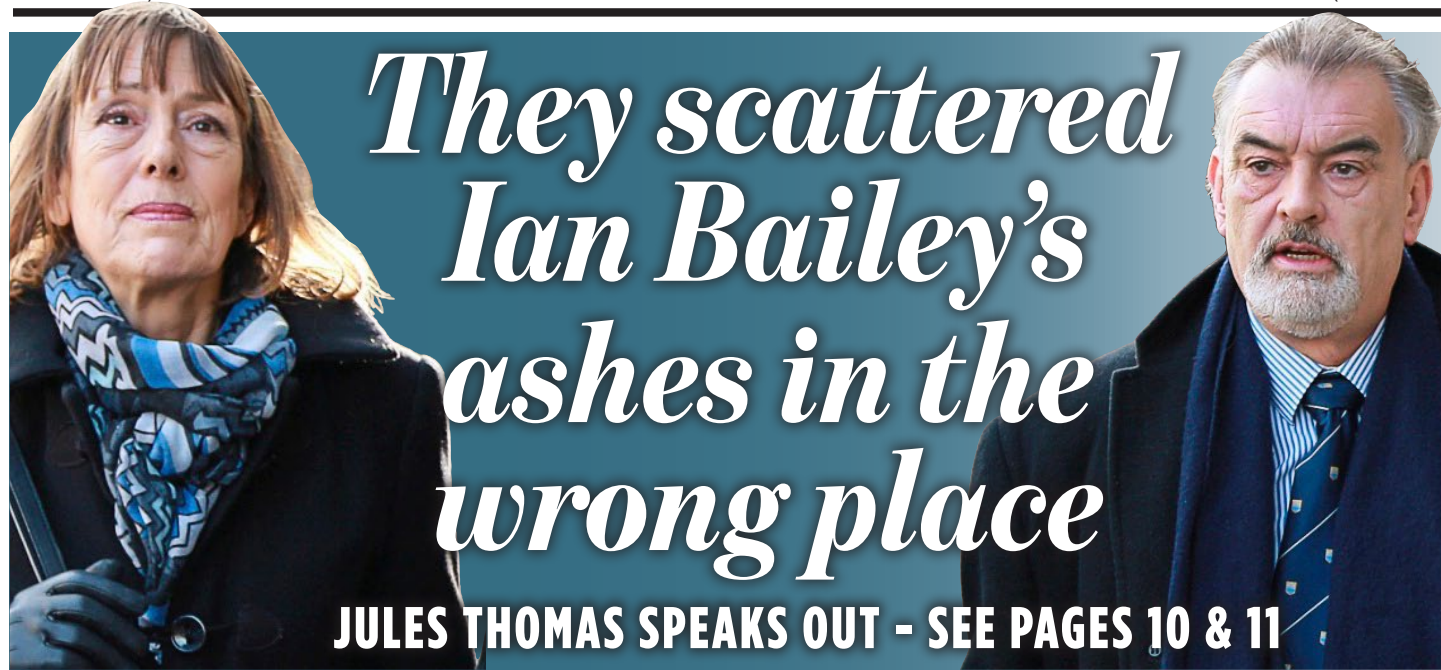




They scattered Ian Bailey's ashes in the wrong place

JULES THOMAS SPEAKS OUT - SEE PAGES 10 & 11

FREE INSIDE

€100

OF VOUCHERS FOR FAMILY DAYS OUT



FOUR-PAGE PULLOUT STARTS PAGE 37

YOUR days out .com

EX-CIVIL SERVANTS GET SWEETHEART OPW 'RENT DEAL'

As rent control law passes, MoS reveals OPW 'ghost houses'

EXCLUSIVE

By Craig Hughes

POLITICAL EDITOR

RETIREED and current civil servants are living effectively rent-free under a sweetheart deal in secret 'ghost houses' in the Phoenix Park, the Irish Mail on Sunday has learned.

The revelation comes as new rent reforms introduced by the Government were signed into law by President Michael D Higgins this week.

It has sparked a political backlash and calls for OPW officials to appear before the Dáil spending watchdog.

As new legislation was fast-tracked in a bid to ease pressure on tenants across the country, it has emerged there are six residential



She said yes!

RYAN TUBRIDY ON POPPING THE QUESTION see Page 21

I was behind the Oasis reunion, says mum Peggy

EXCLUSIVE

By Isabel Conway

WARRING rock siblings Liam and Noel Gallagher's Irish mother has confirmed she was the 'instigator' in healing the infamous rift between her two sons who have reformed Oasis.

Mayo woman Peggy Gallagher told the Irish Mail on Sunday: 'I was the instigator, yes. But, sure, wasn't it always going to happen at some time or other?'

FULL STORY see Pages 4&5 >>>

Turn to Page 6 >>

24-hour security

» From Page One

properties in the heart of Dublin's Phoenix Park that are managed by the Office of Public Works (OPW) but do not exist on any publicly available official asset register.

The OPW has refused to confirm what rents the current and former State employees living in the compound are paying – but overall figures released in 2021 suggest the average rent for such houses could be as low as €135 a month. Despite having individual Eircodes, the terrace houses are not listed on the Land Registry.

A seventh property, a detached four-bay two-storey house, is occupied by a retired civil servant.

The compound, which comprises the Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) offices, borders the lavish Farmleigh House Estate, one of the State's official guesthouses reserved for the Taoiseach and foreign dignitaries. OSI, now Tailte Éireann, is responsible for the country's mapping records.

The homes are inside a compound with 24-hour manned security that is not accessible to the public and requires advance approval to gain access.

A rear entrance for residents is guarded with CCTV, a security fence and code-accessed security door.

The detached four-bay two-storey house

'Decisions are dealt with on a case-by-case basis'

was formerly named the 'Chief Superintendent's Residence' but is now a listed building.

The MoS understands significant taxpayer-funded renovations were carried out to the roof of the property, which was built in 1894.

The Buildings of Ireland website, run by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, notes its original use as a 'workers' house' and that it is 'in use' currently as a 'house'.

The occupancy and existence of other lodges in the Phoenix Park has long been shrouded in secrecy by the OPW.

It is the latest in a series of controversies involving the OPW, which found itself in the public spotlight in recent months over the €336,000 spending on a Dáil bicycle shed; the €1.4m spent on a security 'hut' at an entrance to Government Buildings; and the use of another €490,000 of taxpayers' money on a 70m 'wall of shame' outside the headquarters of the Workplace Relations Commission.

During the last Dáil, former OPW minister Patrick O'Donovan was asked on three occasions about the lodges in the Phoenix Park.

However, he refused to give the exact locations of the properties, citing 'privacy of individual residents/employees and to avoid potential security issues arising from highlighting individual properties that may be vacant'.

In 2023, Mr O'Donovan told Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald there are 'clear criteria' identifying a suitable person to live in any of the Phoenix Park lodges.

The OPW this weekend confirmed the properties are 'owned and maintained by the OPW' and that they are occupied by existing and

PARKLIFE:
Several homes close to the Ordnance Survey offices can be seen in this satellite picture

OPW steps in to answer our questions for the residents

1 THE compound consists of offices and buildings that are occupied by Ordnance Survey Ireland, or Tailte Éireann as it is now known, and seven houses or homes. It is located in Phoenix Park and the residences can be accessed only through the main gate and the back gate of the complex. The Irish Mail on Sunday contacted each of the residents in the homes by registered letter, asking them how much they were paying in rent and offering them a right to reply to this story. We were then contacted by the OPW on their behalf.

retired Tailte Éireann staff and OPW employees.

A spokeswoman said people associated with former staff members were allowed to remain in the dwellings after the State employees had left the accommodation or died.

'Historically, on occasion, individuals/ widowed spouses have remained in residential dwellings following their retirement and these decisions are dealt with on a case-by-case basis,' the spokeswoman said in a statement.

'The properties referred to in this press query are owned and maintained by the OPW and occupied by Tailte Éireann (formerly Ordnance Survey Ireland) staff/ former staff and OPW staff. These

are State-owned listed buildings, located in a confined campus on a secure site.'

The spokeswoman said of the renovation works carried out on

'Allocated to staff in specific posts'

the Phoenix Park properties: 'Since 2021, the OPW has carried out a programme of remedial/maintenance works to the residences in the Tailte Éireann site in line with our obligations and the protected status of the buildings.

'Works included roof repairs,

Cracking the (Eir)code

2 THE row of terrace houses is marked in red, along with the Superintendent's Residence which is towards the front of the compound. It is pictured inset right. Each of the terraced houses has an Eircode. The Eircode attached to the residence appears to be the same as the OSI/Tailte Éireann offices.



insulation, replacement of windows, lime plaster repairs and some internal repairs/maintenance. These works were approved at the appropriate level within the OPW.'

However, the OPW has refused to say why the six 'secret' houses are not listed on any publicly available register or land registry. They have also refused to say how much rent is being paid for each property.

The spokeswoman would only say: 'These properties are primarily allocated to staff in specific posts where there is a requirement for officials to be present on the ground as part of their employment/official duties and this is reflected in the level of rent charged,' they said.

In response to parliamentary

queries from former Green Party TD Neasa Hourigan in 2022, then-OPW minister Mr O'Donovan said there were 41 lodges and properties in the Phoenix Park.

In 2021, rent from the lodges in the Phoenix Park generated an income of €53,830 for the Exchequer. As eight of the properties were not occupied at the time, it means the remaining 33 lodges were generating an average of just €1,631 rental income per year, or €135 per month.

The average rent in Dublin at the time was more than €1,800. But over the past four years this has soared to an average of €2,350.

Ms Hourigan had sought a list of OPW-owned dwellings and habitable structures in the Phoenix Park,

for OPW lodges



Compound interest is kept away

3 THE compound has a 24-hour manned security presence (circled) and is not accessible to the public, who require advance approval be allowed on site. On top of all this, a rear entrance for the residents is guarded with CCTV, a security fence and a code-accessed security door.

CHAMBERS' SPENDING PURGE TO FUND INFRASTRUCTURE

Page 14

as well as clarity on whether the properties were occupied. However, the former TD was not provided with details of the State-owned properties.

The homes in the Phoenix Park are not registered with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) as the OPW, as a public body, is exempt from doing so.

Last week, the Government announced changes to reform the rental sector as it comes under pressure to ease the unprecedented accommodation shortage. The major shift was announced by Housing Minister James Browne as part of plans to attract more private investment into the rental market, aiming to boost supply while enhancing protections for

tenants. As a result of the measures, from midnight on Thursday the entire country became a Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ).

Social Democrats TD and

'Public will have a great interest in the answers'

member of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Aidan Farrelly this weekend said the controversy-plagued State agency must appear before the committee to answer questions about the secret properties.

The Kildare North TD told the

MoS: 'Based on what has been presented, I think management in the OPW should come before PAC to answer questions about the origins of these houses in terms of ownership, planning permission, maintenance and occupancy.

'Given that this is ultimately funded through the Exchequer, I'll be writing to the chairman of PAC [Sinn Féin TD John Brady] to request that we issue correspondence to the OPW to answer questions on the same,' he said.

'There are questions here about decision-making processes that I believe members of PAC and the wider public will have great interest in hearing the answers to amidst a worsening housing crisis.'

craig.hughes@mailonsunday.ie

Department employee paid weekly rent of €2

By Craig Hughes

THE Department of Agriculture was previously found to be charging €2 a week in rent to a former employee who was living in a cottage owned by the State.

The revelation was made to the Oireachtas Public Accounts Committee (PAC) last year in a report about assets owned by the department.

An examination team from the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) visited Backweston in Co. Kildare, where the Department of Agriculture and Department of Justice have facilities.

The team discovered a Georgian farmhouse known as 'Stacumny Cottage' during the visit and found it was not recorded on the department's or the OPW's asset register.

The department said the farm foreman lives in the farmhouse.

The C&AG's examination found 'no clear business purpose or policy in place for the use of the cottage'.

Stacumny Cottage had been previously occupied by a farm labourer and his family, and subsequently by his widow, until 2011.

The PAC was told that there was confusion surrounding several cottages in

Backweston estate which led to the department choosing to rent one of the properties, Stacumny Cottage, to an employee since 2011.

According to the report, the arrangement was put in place 'to mitigate against leaving the property vacant for lengthy periods of time and to prevent the property from becoming derelict'.

Annual rent of €104 was charged to the employee, equating to just €2 a week.

Former Green Party TD and then PAC member Marc Ó Cathasaigh spoke of his shock when he read the revelations in the report.

'I have to tell you, when I read this chapter, my jaw dropped,' he said at the time.

'It was decided we found a Georgian house.

'We didn't know the house was there, but then we found out that the farm foreman resides on the farm, but we found out there is no tenancy agreement in place.

'We find out about Stacumny Cottage that this is let to a member of staff for €104 a year, which is fairly good rent, I would think, in this market,' he added.



JAW DROPPING: The Georgian Cottage in Backweston, Co. Kildare