

NEWTOWN WARD MEETING

WARD: Newtown	DATE: 29 January 2019
VENUE: St Georges Community Hub, Great Hampton Row B19 3TG	START/FINISH TIMES: 6.30pm – 8.10pm
COUNCILLOR Ziaul Islam	NOs OF ATTENDEES: 15
OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Pat Whyte, Community Support & Development Officer Kay Thomas, Community Governance Manager	VISITING SPEAKER: Councillor Waseem Zaffar, Cabinet Member, Transport & Environment

MATTERS DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING:

1. Police & Fire Update – not in attendance

- 2. Clean Air Zone**

Cllr Zaffar outlined the proposals for the Clean Air Zone and the reasons behind the need for its introduction. Modelling had shown where the highest concentrations of pollution in the city were to be found and the CAZ had been drawn around that area. During the modelling, various options had been considered including exempting private vehicles from the charge for entering the CAZ but this would not have reduced pollution enough to significantly impact on the levels. In response to questions the meeting was advised that diesel cars registered from 2016 onwards and petrol cars from 2007 would not be subject to charges. Free parking just outside the City Centre would be removed to prevent motorists leaving their cars and the council would pay for residents parking schemes.

It was acknowledged that the CAZ charges would affect some of the poorest communities and therefore application had been made for government grant to ensure mitigations could be put in place.

Residents made the following comments;

- The government had actively encouraged diesel cars and should therefore reimburse the cost or provide a realistic scrappage scheme
- Real concern that tourist attractions such as the Jewellery Quarter, Botanical Gardens and the shopping centre would be adversely affected. Visitors would go elsewhere.

- There were no direct bus routes that went across the city therefore to travel by bus to avoid the charge would necessitate at least 2 bus journeys and this made travel expensive.
- There was a cost issue for parents who would have to use buses and for parents trying to get children to different schools. A school bus system was suggested.
- Some residents did not believe the statistics relating to deaths from pollution as they had lived in the area all of their lives and were not aware of anyone being made ill.
- The scrappage scheme would not help people living in the area as it would still not help them to buy an alternative car.
- No other measures had been put in place to encourage people out of their cars and if motorists with non-compliant cars chose to pay the charge the situation would not be improved.
- Residents were being penalised. Visitors were being penalised.
- More cars would be coming into the city for the Commonwealth Games – where would park and ride car parks be situated?
- The importance of the CAZ was acknowledged but the implementation and mitigation needed to be better thought out. The cost of bus fares for parents to get children to school was prohibitive and so school buses needed to be organised before the CAZ was introduced.
- The housing stock in the area had not been upgraded for 25 years and the houses and flats were damp and in poor condition. This was a contributing factor towards resident's ill health but no action was being taken to make improvements. Housing conditions were poor and more attention should be paid to how residents had to live in the area as it was also infested with vermin. Residents felt they had been 'forgotten' and while money could be spent in the city centre there was no planned regeneration of Newtown.

In response Councillor Zaffar made the following points;

- There would be an exemption period for those living in the CAZ for 2 years and after that period the council would still work with communities
- There would be conversations with affected residents to provide information & ensure that they were registered for exemptions. This would be done on-line but also face to face. Residents within the CAZ would be a priority
- Motorists would upgrade their vehicles, some would convert to public transport so there would in future be fewer cars travelling

through residential areas

- There had been ongoing conversations with businesses & the business community. Grants for businesses would be available from Government & if not working in 24 months the situation would be re-visited
- Bus services in the city were not as they should be and there was currently a consultation paper out to find out why people did not use buses & how this could be improved.
- Safer air levels across the city was the aim of the CAZ
- Pollution around schools was a problem so the council was looking to tackle this through school exclusion zones. Residents parking zone would also assist with inconsiderate parking.
- There would be a lifetime exemption for school transport
- £2000 would be offered to assist in purchasing a compliant vehicle
- Money from the CAZ charges would be re-invested in public transport, improvements to air quality & to help health inequalities
- Pilots were being undertaken with taxi drivers to look at converting diesel engines to petrol or LPG and grants would be made available. The city council would also buy 50 electric vehicles for hire as a further mitigation.
- The council had worked with Birmingham University International Air Quality experts to come up with the best proposal.
- This was not something the council had chosen to do but due to the Government being taken to court regarding pollution the top 5 cities had received a Ministerial Directive to reduce air pollution and a threat of legal action if levels were not reduced. Birmingham had to be legally compliant in 12 months.

3. Local Issues

- a) Housing Issues – in view of the concerns raised by residents in respect of problems with council owned housing, Councillor Islam undertook to invite the Cabinet Member for Housing & Homes to the next meeting**