

BALSALL HEATH WEST WARD MEETING NOTES

WARD: Balsall Heath West	DATE: 2 nd November 2023
VENUE: Balsall Heath Church Centre, Mary Street B12 9JU	START/FINISH TIMES: 6.30pm – 8.15pm
COUNCILLOR Shehla Moledina	NOs OF ATTENDEES: 21
OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Mark Wolstencroft, Operations Manager Environmental Protection Sergeant Karn Sharma, West Midlands Police Kay Thomas, Community Governance Manager	VISITING SPEAKER: Simon Foster, Police & Crime Commissioner Councillor Saima Suleman, Cabinet Member Digital, Culture, Heritage & Tourism

MATTERS DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING INCLUDING LOCAL CONCERNS:

1. Welcome & Notice of Recording

Councillor Moledina welcomed all to the meeting and advised that members of the public/press could record and take photographs of the meeting except where there were exempt or confidential items.

2. Local Traveller Encampments

Mark Wolstencroft responded to concerns raised by local residents with regard travellers repeatedly gaining access onto Calthorpe Park and how future encampments could be prevented. The following main points were made –

- The last 2 encampments had occurred in June & July/August. The first of 12 vehicles had been moved in 5 days and the second of 20 vehicles had taken 7 days to move on having required eviction procedures.
- The damage, disruption and waste left behind was acknowledged and the council had dealt with this.
- Consideration had been given to preventative measures such as trip rails, bunds and trenches but where this had been tried in other parks the travellers had managed to breach them. There was also a cost implication.
- Crime and disorder concerns should be referred to the police as they had alternative powers to the city council and were able to remove travellers within 24hours in certain cases.

Residents then made the following comments –

- There had been another encampment on Calthorpe Park at the end of October so was becoming a regular disruption for park users. Security measures needed to be taken and the cost of clearing the park after each incursion was queried.
- The build of an embankment to protect the park was requested.
- It was acknowledged that this was a city-wide problem but given the number of illegal encampments, were there transit sites available for travellers to use and were they of appropriate size etc?

Councillor Moledina said that residents living near to Calthorpe Park were suffering and queried if travellers were being directed to the transit sites and whether Balsall Heath West had more encampments than other wards in the city. She felt a harmonious way of dealing with the problem needed to be found.

Sergeant Sharma said that he had been aware of 3 encampments on Calthorpe Park this year that had been moved on. There had been resistance from the travellers resulting in bailiffs being engaged which had delayed the movement from the park. Damage to trip rails etc was criminal damage but had to be witnessed. With regard to the transit site in Nechells, damage previously caused had been repaired and measures put in to prevent further damage. There were 15 pitches that it was hoped would be available by the end of the year. A further piece of land was available in Nechells to create a further site and legal action against current family on the site in Castle Vale was being taken to move them on and release 10 pitches there. Meeting was advised that as traveller groups got moved on from a site, they tended to move around the city so Balsall Heath West was not targeted more than other wards. Mark Wolstencroft undertook to forward maps of where unauthorised encampments had set up camp across the city to Councillor Moledina.

It was noted that the city council/police had a duty of care to travelling families and their way of life and there was a balance to be made between that and disturbance and nuisance to residents.

3. Local Policing

Simon Foster, Police & Crime Commissioner explained his role and the Police & Crime Plan. Top priority in the Plan was rebuilding community policing, along with combating violence against women and girls, domestic abuse and violent crime including knife crime. Prevention and restoring trust and confidence in the police was key.

Recorded crime in Balsall Heath East displayed a similar pattern to the West Midlands in general – violent crime/sex offences accounting for 47% and vehicle crime 9%.

Residents then asked the following questions and the Police and Crime Commissioner responded –

- Considerable concern raised over the lack of neighbourhood policing and absence of officers on the street. Crime in Balsall Heath had statistically remained the same year on year so no improvements despite numerous plans/discussions to reduce crime. Car crime was a particular problem but when reported no action appeared taken, just a crime number issued to the victim, this then resulting in increased insurance costs. With this in mind the Police & Crime Commissioner was asked if a conversation had been had with insurance companies regarding security etc. It was further suggested that a meeting of PCC, M.P's and councillors be arranged with the insurance industry to discuss, through their social value obligations, how they could help protect the community. Sergeant Sharma while acknowledging the points made said evidence would be required to convince the industry eg enhanced Neighbourhood & Street Watches etc.
- Increased numbers of exempt accommodation/HMO properties were causing ASB issues and affecting the everyday lives of residents. Landlords responsible for caring for tenants were not offering appropriate levels of care/support and there was a call for the police to work with BCC to ensure such properties were run/managed properly.
- The crime statistics were not always reflective of actual crimes as residents were not reporting due to lack of confidence in a police response.
- Reports of drug dealing occurring on residential streets. Sergeant Sharma undertook to take details at conclusion of meeting.
- In response the PCC advised exempt accommodation was not currently subject to licensing, but legislation was due that would be subject to consultation. Due to the use of HMO accommodation by criminals he had requested the Home Secretary include that in the consultation.
- The PCC explained the new neighbourhood policing model and that community policing would have better resources enabling better response. Balsall Heath Chief Superintendent would have more available officers in terms of response, offender management and community police teams. The Chief Constable supported community policing and had undertaken to make police officers more visible on the streets.

4. Cabinet Member for Digital, Culture, Heritage & Tourism – Councillor Saima Suleman

Councillor Suleman explained her role and responsibilities as a Cabinet Member.

Residents referred to the influx of tourists that regularly came to Balsall Heath visiting the Edgbaston Cricket Ground, Canon Hill Park and The MAC and the impact it had on local residents. However, there appeared no consideration given to this when the city council was thinking about parking and event policies and as a result, streets became gridlocked, pollution increased, local roads were closed without consultation or thought about the impact on the local community. A joint solution was required from the council/police/visitor venues. A suggestion was to revert to free parking at Canon Hill Park to ease parking on neighbouring roads.

In response to comments regarding road closures Sergeant Sharma said he would look into police involvement as he believed it to be a highway responsibility.

Councillor Suleman acknowledged resident's frustrations and undertook to work with Councillor Moledina to come up with a collective solution around the Cricket Ground issues, in conjunction with the Leader of the Council (major events sat within his portfolio). With regard to road closures this should be fed back to the Cabinet Member for Transport.

Residents suggested a future ward meeting focus on the parking & other issues around the Cricket Ground, including the lack of community consultation on application for a late-night entertainment licence and residents' belief that this was contrary to a previous local agreement. Councillor Moledina said that she was in dialogue with Edgbaston Cricket Ground Chief Executive in connection with planning/licensing applications and other issues and had extended an invite to a future ward meeting, which had been accepted.

Reference was also made to abuse of H-Markings outside residential properties and the need for removal where there was no-longer a valid reason for them to be associated with a property.

5. Ward Plan

Reference made to the last meeting where discussions had come up with priorities for the ward plan. The draft had been circulated with the agenda and any further comments were welcomed.

The following suggestions were made –

- Willows Road traffic flow - include consideration of a one-way system to reduce bottle neck, improve traffic flow and enable buses better access to shops and improve pollution levels and quality of life for residents.
- Sergeant Sharma advised graduates had looked at hotspot crime and traffic flow areas as part of their dissertations and undertook to provide Councillor Moledina with copies.
- Include reference to previous Neighbourhood Plan for Balsall Heath and revisit. Event to come together and discuss.

Councillor Moledina asked any further suggestions that were realistic and had attainable solutions given the availability of resources to be emailed to Kay and added that groups could arrange meetings to work together on specific areas of work and she would offer her support.

ACTIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS MADE	WHO	BY WHEN
1. Unauthorised encampment maps city wide for circulation	1. Mark Wolstencroft to Cllr Moledina	1. asap

2. Road closures in respect events at Cricket Ground/Canon Hill Park	2. Sgt Sharma to look at police involvement	2. asap
3. Councillor Moledina & Cabinet Member for Digital, Culture, Heritage & Tourism to work towards a solution around Cricket Ground events and impact on local community.	3. Cllrs Moledina & Saima Suleman	3. ongoing
4. Road closures for events at Cricket Ground/Canon Hill Park without local consultation referred to Cabinet Member for Transport	4. Cllr Moledina	
5. Future meeting on issues around Edgbaston Cricket Ground to include invite to Edgbaston Cricket Ground representatives.	5. Cllr Moledina	5. Future meeting
6. Graduate reports on crime/traffic hotspots to be sent to Cllr Moledina	6. Sgt Sharma	6. asap