

**JOINT MEETING OF SPARKBROOK & BALSALL HEATH EAST &
BALSALL HEATH WEST WARDS**

WARD: Jt Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath East & Balsall Heath West	DATE: 13 November 2019
VENUE: Balsall Heath Church Centre, Mary Street	START/FINISH TIMES: 7pm – 9.05pm
COUNCILLORS: Shabrana Hussain	NOs OF ATTENDEES: 45
OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Sergeant Chris Rigby, West Midlands Police PCSO Poppy Merrick, West Midlands Police John Mole, Community Development & Support Officer Kay Thomas, Community Governance Manager	Apologies: Councillor Azim & Councillor Malik

MATTERS DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING:

1. Police Update

Sergeant Rigby circulated a leaflet outlining the work of the team and made the following points;

- There had been proactive work to enable several warrants and arrests for drug crimes, knife point robberies, disorder and shoplifting.
- Community engagement with local groups and charities leading to an awards night and diversionary work for young people in danger of involvement with violent crime.
- Parking enforcement continued and patrols with Street Watch and weapon sweeps
- There was a general increase in overall crime but reductions in robbery, burglaries & criminal damage in Balsall Heath.

In response to residents questions Sergeant Rigby answered as follows;

- New officers were being recruited and a programme was being run by a junior Iman who was also a police officer and he hoped this would lead to an interest in the police force as a career

- Residents acknowledged that the focus on violent crime was right there were other minor crimes/issues that were not a priority for the police but were frustrating for residents eg pavement parking, poor driving. Sergeant Rigby said that to tackle such problems effectively there needed to be a culture change in certain behaviour. The PCSO's went into schools on a weekly basis to educate and issued tickets for pavement parking daily. There was a junior PCSO programme in schools and children were taking messages home. A message regarding safe cycling would be put out in WMNow. Operation Parksafes was also explained.
- In response to concerns raised regarding unsafe parking around the chip shop, Edward Road, the meeting was advised that the police team were trying to set up a Business Watch as tickets had been issued in that road but the problem continued.
- Sergeant Rigby undertook to take details regarding anti-social behaviour issues affecting Fallows Road mosque and to arrange a meeting, involving the councillors. He added that a Street Watch in the area would be beneficial.

2. Sparkbrook Neighbourhood Forum

Mohammed Ashfaq gave an update on the Neighbourhood Forum. It had not met for several months due to lack of resources & volunteers but he had taken over and was getting things back on track. The truck had been maintained by the mosque so it had taken over its use, in response to a query from Cllr Hussain the meeting was advised to contact the mosque if community groups were interested in using the van. Volunteers were limited so Councillor Hussain had the ward barrow so that it could be used more generally. A new Forum Chair was due to start soon and details would be forwarded to Cllr Hussain.

3. Pioneer Places

Dave Cusack explained that through the work of community organisations & local residents and application to become a Pioneer Place had been submitted to BCC. He explained what a Pioneer Place was and that it was a way of, through the White Paper of encouraging neighbourhoods to take more control of their area. The area in question was defined by the Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Plan. More work needed to be done on the ideas in the application, including discussions with residents.

The main ideas of the plan were;

- Make democracy more local/mini council for Balsall Heath
- Deliver some services locally eg street cleaning, parks

- Create a body to raise new money to improve Balsall Heath
- To take forward bid to Big Lottery being made to among other things employ someone to talk to residents & recreate residents groups as in the past

Dave said he would regularly report to the ward meeting with updates. The Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Plan could be found on line.

Councillor Hussain said that at a future meeting Pioneer Place would be a single item agenda so that it could be discussed in more detail.

4. Ward Plan Update

John Mole explained the purpose of the ward plan and that as a living document would be regularly reviewed.

Residents expressed frustration that similar plans had been drawn up in the past with priorities for the ward but commissioners of services did not use them and there was no evidence that they brought any services or improvements into Balsall Heath. It was also noted that there was a Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Plan and therefore the need for another ward plan was questioned. John confirmed that if residents wished to use the Balsall Heath Plan this could be done.

5. Bus Priority on Moseley Road & Alcester Road

Councillor Hussain explained that this item had been included on the agenda at the request of residents who were concerned about the proposals.

John Newson, local resident outlined the proposals for the bus priority measures on Moseley Road & Alcester Road and circulated the plans. He said that these proposals, if successful would be the biggest change to Balsall Heath in 100 years and would see the Moseley Road through Balsall Heath being widened to enable bus lanes to be introduced to speed up bus journeys. There was no similar scheme suggested for Moseley or Kings Heath. To do this the pavements would be made narrower – to 2.2mtrs- 11 mature trees would be lost and car park spaces removed. The narrowing of the pavements was of particular concern to residents as it was not felt this was a safe width for such a busy road. This issue would be intensified when the street furniture, street lighting and bus stops were put back onto the pavement.

Four lanes of traffic with less availability for parking would lead to a clearer road and encourage speeding.

There would be less room for trees and the environment would be made worse for pedestrians & cyclists; cyclists in particular would find it more difficult.

The proposals would also impact on local shops and businesses that relied on pedestrian footfall and cars being able to park.

There had been no input into the proposals from local people who knew the area best prior to the consultation.

Danny Gouveia, TfWM, advised that the proposals were out for consultation and resident's views would help shape the outcome and therefore taking part in the consultation was important. The ideas behind the proposals had been taken from suggestions highlighted in the Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Plan. In response to comments from residents Danny said that;

- The road would require widening to accommodate the bus lanes
- Following the road widening the pavements would be at a 2.1/2.2 metre width
- 5 trees would have to be removed
- There would be a loss of 8 parking spaces on Moseley Road, others would be maintained with a change to the parking restriction times
- The impact had been carefully considered and funding would be invested to deal with street clutter, pedestrian crossings and the condition of the footpath – all things identified as requiring attention in the Neighbourhood Plan
- The bus lanes when not in use would be used for parking and therefore traffic would not increase.

Residents made further comments of objection as follows;

- While this proposal had been worked on for 12 months, residents had been asking for Balsall Heath train station to be opened for 20 years – residents were best placed to know what was good for the area and resources should be directed accordingly
- Buses used diesel fuel and were therefore contributing to environmental pollution. Trains were electric.
- There was minimal journey time saved by introducing bus lanes. The 3 and a half minutes reduction in a bus journey was not worth the disruption, loss of trees and detrimental impact on Balsall Heath.
- The trees were evident in historic photographs of Balsall Heath and were part of the historic landscape
- There were 2 bus lanes in existence already that were not used to full effect because of parked cars before spending funding on

this project reduce parking in the existing lanes and see if that increased journey times

- Concern expressed for people with disabilities and the frail elderly in accessing facilities along the Moseley Road while the works were on going.
- There was no joined up approach to bus lanes across the city and if there was a genuine wish to encourage more people onto public transport then bus lanes should be installed along all main roads; having this short section would be of no benefit.

In response the meeting was advised that there would be a 30% improvement time in bus journey times along the route. This was disputed by residents and reference made to information provided at the drop-in sessions. Work was ongoing with the council in respect of the Clean Air Zone and climate change and through the scheme improved enforcement would be looked into.

Residents were reminded that the consultation ended on 22 November.

6. Any Other Business

a) Take Away Food Shops – a local resident drew attention to the vast number of fast food take aways in the area and that new ones were opening where premises had not previously been used for that purpose. The issue of obesity was not helped by the proliferation of cheap food shops. Councillor Hussain agreed and said she opposed every planning application for a new fast food restaurant.

b) Montgomery Street Business Centre – the meeting was advised that the centre was the last BCC start up hub and the council were planning on auctioning it on 11 December as it had been declared surplus without consultation. 80 people were employed at the centre and they had formed a co-op with a constructive proposal to buy the site. Support from groups, councillors and residents was requested to help get the centre pulled from the auction. In view of support for small businesses the centre should be part of the ward plan.

John Mole queried whether the co-op had considered applying to be an Asset of Community Value. The meeting was advised this had been done but it had not been processed as the nominate person to contact on the form no longer worked for the council and there was no-one else to assist. John undertook to take the details at the conclusion of the meeting and pursue. Councillor Hussain said she had a meeting with the Leader and would express support for the centre from the ward meeting.

Residents all expressed their support for the Montgomery Street Business Centre and that the co-op should be allowed to take over its running.

- c) **Bright Futures Foundation Sports Association** – Naseem spoke of a proposal to to use the corner of Balsall Heath Park (sandpitscorner of Balsall Heath Rd/Cheddar Rd) for sports activities including football pitches, sports centre to benefit the community and local schools. It was hoped that the land would be transferred as an asset transfer.

A local resident referred to Anderton Park School and lottery money allocate to create a community sports hall that had been built but had never been open to the community as intended. There was some opposition to the loss of green space.

Councillors (s) Signed:

Councillor(s) Name(s) (please print):