

**NOTES OF THE ASTON WARD MEETING HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2018 AT  
6.30pm AT THE CHURCH OF GOD, WENLOCK ROAD, ASTON**

Present: Councillor Muhammad Afzal (Chair) Councillor Ziaul Islam & Councillor Nagina Kauser

Inspector Iftekhhar Ahmed, West Midlands Police  
Andrew Perry, Senior Service Manager  
Don Beckett, Senior Housing Needs Officer  
Michael McMillan, Place Manager  
Pat Whyte, Neighbourhood Development & Support Officer  
Kay Thomas, Community Governance Manager

There were 70+ residents also in attendance

**1. Notice of recordings** – Noted

**2. Apologies** – none

**3. Update from the Police**

Inspector Ahmed provided the following update;

- Crime across the country had increased by 15% and this was reflected in the West Midlands. Aston was a priority ward as there had been a 20% increase in overall crime based year on year.
- Prevention was a priority along with guns and gangs
- Specific operations were organised to respond to crime associated with drugs

**4. Waste Management Update**

The Chair advised that although invited there was no officer in attendance. Residents from Arden Road, Fentham Road, Freer Road and Hampton Road reported numerous missed collections and despite trying to report to the council the number had not been answered.

On behalf of residents in Perry Aston the meeting was advised that bins were not being returned to point of collection and were being left on the pavement, knocked over and with lids open so filling with rain water and the situation had become worse following the strike action. The Chair was asked to report this as a matter of urgency to the person with responsibility.

**5. Barry Jackson Tower Update**

Andrew Perry made the following points in respect of matters raised by residents at the previous meeting;

- Cabinet had taken the decision to refurbish Barry Jackson Tower at its meeting on 15 August 2017
- Contractors were currently on site – asbestos was being removed and work was on track to open the first 10 floors ready for occupation by August with the remaining floors to follow.
- Residents concerns were acknowledged and understood but an assurance was given that no-one with a history of addiction or a criminal record would be housed in Barry Jackson Tower. There was a 3 stage vetting process, which was explained, before being accepted into the block and if there was any risk to neighbours or the person seeking accommodation a place would not be granted.
- There would be security and staff on site 24/7.
- Homelessness was increasing and there were many families living in unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation, in some cases outside Birmingham. Homeless centres, such as Barry Jackson Tower and Magnolia House in Highgate were to reduce the use of B&B and enable local families to be housed in Birmingham.
- Barry Jackson Tower had been chosen because it was a council owned property that was available and there was a serious need to find property to reduce reliance on B&B accommodation, not because the location was Aston.

Residents then made the following comments;

- Residents were angered that there had been no consultation in respect of the plans for Barry Jackson Tower and did not believe that vulnerable people would not end up being housed in the tower block if the plans for refurbishment were to go ahead.
- At the previous meeting councillors had said that there would have to be consultation before the scheme could progress but the refurbishment was continuing.
- It was wrong to come into a neighbourhood and impose something that would affect residents without giving them an opportunity to have an input.
- Reference was made to the Localism Act and that the Housing Ombudsman would be contacted regarding the lack of consultation and the absence of planning permission in light of the fact that the contractors were continuing to work in the block.
- Pregnant women and children should not be housed in a tower block and vulnerable people would not be helped by being housed in a high rise tower.
- The reason for opening 10 floors at a time was questioned.
- The area around Barry Jackson Tower was not safe in view of the crime associated with the block and bringing more people with

difficulties into the area was not acceptable and would impact on the residents already living there.

- Residents called for the block to be demolished and new social housing built on the site as previously agreed and called on the councillors to make that happen.
- It was believed that families would not want to live in Barry Jackson Tower. It had been approved for demolition as it was not fit to house people. There had been arsons, suicides, murder, prostitution and drug and gang related issues associated with the block which would re-emerge once it was known that it was re-opening.
- The police had already reported that crime in the area had increased by 20% and this proposal would add to that as well as over stretching already stretched resources such as schools, police, street cleaning etc. The tenants would not be permanent and therefore would not be part of the community.
- If offenders were not being housed why was permanent security required?
- Local schools and the police objected to the use of Barry Jackson Tower for temporary accommodation.
- If the council really wanted to help vulnerable, homeless households it would demolish the block and build permanent, affordable housing in its place.

In response to some of the points Andrew Perry commented;

- Offenders would not be housed in Barry Jackson Tower. The council did not accommodate offenders.
- The workmen working on site did not have the details and did not know who would be living there.
- The flats had been in need of total refurbishment because when decommissioned bathrooms, kitchens etc were ripped out to deter squatters from moving in
- The accommodation would be let 10 floors at a time to enable the sprinkler system to be fitted.

The Chair in response to a direct question said that the councillors had met with the Leader of the Council and put forward the views of residents and advised that they were in support of those views. Councillor Islam added that they had requested consultation with the residents and had submitted the petition on behalf of residents.

Residents then demanded that the Cabinet reverse its decision in respect of the refurbishment of Barry Jackson Tower for use as

temporary accommodation and in consultation with residents demolish Barry Jackson Tower and build new social housing on the site.

Councillors agreed with the above request and to forward it to the Cabinet.

## **6. Residents Issues**

### **a) Austerity Measures Aston**

A resident expressed concern about the diminishing resources in the ward ie closure of the neighbourhood office, swimming pool, The Drum. Cut backs had affected Aston but when funding was available the residents living in the ward did not appear to benefit. The Chair advised of the various funding streams that had benefited Aston such as Aston Pride, City Challenge etc. The funding for Barry Jackson Tower had come from central government and was specific to the purpose for which it was being used. If it was not spent it would be clawed back. The councillors had worked to ensure that Aston did receive its fair share of resources.

A resident referred to Aston Pride and that the funding had been for a small area of the ward and the legacy from that funding was queried. While money might be spent in the ward there needed to be a lasting legacy for the benefit of residents.

Meeting ended at 8.10pm