

ACOCKS GREEN WARD FORUM MEETING NOTES

Wednesday 29th June 2023

7pm – 8.30pm

Fox Hollies Forum

Greenwood Avenue

B27 7RA

COUNCILLORS: Roger Harmer and Penny Wagg

NOs OF ATTENDEES: 12

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Beverly Edmead – Community Governance Team

Debbie White – Neighbourhood Action Coordinator, Acocks Green
and Glebe Farm & Tile Cross Wards

Jordan Westcarr – ASB Officer, Community Safety Partnership Team

Apologies

Acocks Green Local Police Team

MATTERS DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING:

Cllr Roger Harmer in the Chair

1. Notice of Recording

Residents were advised that they were able to record and/or take photographs of the meeting.

2. Ward Action Plan 2022 – 2026 and Ward Funding Update

Cllr Harmer advised of the funding streams that had been made available to each Ward following the submission of their Ward Action Plan- these were:-

Community Chest 2023 - £10,000 per Councillor

Celebrating Communities – Beyond Birmingham 2022 - £35,000

Brum Breathes/Clean Air Zone - £40,000 per two Member Ward per year (2year fund)

Neighbourhood Action Coordinator Small Grants Fund - £10,000

However, following an announcement earlier during the day by the Chief Executive regarding the City Council's current financial state due to potential liabilities for ongoing Equal Pay claims and resolving the Oracle payment system, a decision had been made for all non-essential spending to be ceased with immediate effect whilst a plan of action and recovery was being discussed and agreed.

Currently, it was unclear if this decision would affect the funding recently allocated to wards, but until then, consideration should still be given to how to make use of the funding to help tackle some of the priorities agreed in the Ward Action Plan.

Residents expressed concerns that issues relating to Equal Pay claims had not been fully resolved and were still ongoing, with new claims continuing to be submitted, and that essential services and much needed community support could be affected as a result of the financial crisis. Cllr Harmer briefly advised of the 2010 Equal Pay Act that ensured that all forms of pay and other contractual terms were determined without sex discrimination or bias, and the statutory obligation of employers to eliminate discriminatory pay practices and pay disparities in the workplace. The City Council had to resolve this and the IT issues relating to Oracle as soon as possible.

Referring to the Ward Action Plan, Cllr Harmer confirmed this was now live on the City Council website and reminded residents it was a working document to be reviewed and updated as necessary. He had also asked for the data relating to deprivation comparisons for the Acocks Green to be updated accordingly.

Updates

Young People

Youth Voice to be set up to bring local schools together - Jack Matthews, Youth Worker, Acocks Green Youth Forum currently dealing. Acocks Greener would also like to see more schools involved with green/environmental issues.

Roads/Pavements/lighting etc

Dudley Park Road – traffic lights obscured by overgrown trees – in need of cutting back. Location of overgrown/dangerous trees in the ward also needed to be identified.

Debbie White, Neighbourhood Action Coordinator agreed to obtain the tree maintenance/pruning schedule from Kier

Ward Funding and Criteria

- Community Chest Fund 2023 – localised unrestricted fund for Cllrs to engage and work with residents /groups/key stakeholders to tackle issues. Can also be used to match-fund other locally based ward funding stream. Residents/Groups unable to apply directly for the fund – agreement/allocation must be recorded at Ward Forum Meetings.
- Celebrating Communities – Beyond Birmingham 2022 – following on from last year’s Celebrating Communities Fund (CCF) Be Active; Ready, Steady Fun and Celebrating Communities. Round 1 closing date for applications was 30 June 2023.
- Brum Breathes – Clean Air Zone – applications to be made directly to the Clean Air Zone Team and should be linked priorities in the Ward Action Plan for measures/steps to promote the benefits of cleaner air. The Fund is available until March 2024
- Neighbourhood Action Coordinator – Small Grants Fund available to community/voluntary groups to help tackle/address some of the concerns identified in the Ward Action Plan. Maximum amount of £2,000 could be applied for.

Other funding included the Ward Minor Highways Budget of £20,000 for minor traffic/highway measures in the ward – groups unable to apply; potential projects/proposals discussed and agreed by Cllrs and Local Engineers.

Responding to residents’ questions, Cllr Harmer advised that funding could not be used for extra policing or staffing resources; CCTV cameras/enforcement etc as future costs had to included - these requests would require core funding. He added that the City Council had applied for more enforcement powers to be devolved to enable them to tackle driving offences such as illegal right turns at junctions, driving the wrong direction down a one-way road. This was currently being piloted in the City Centre/Edgbaston areas – Cllrs had asked for Acocks Green to be considered as a pilot area.

Cllr Harmer added that a meeting with the new Chief Constable was recently held to learn more about the new ways of working for West Midlands Police – discussions included local policing issues and neighbourhood policing.

3. Local Updates

- Acocks Green Business Improvement District (BID)

Debbie White, Neighbourhood Action Coordinator advised that all the business units in the original BID area had been visited and asked to complete a questionnaire about the previous BID and their thoughts on whether they would like to see it reinstated. To date, quite a

been returned and follow up visits would be made to encourage business owners to return the questionnaire – a majority yes vote would be needed before the request could be referred to the City Council BID Team.

Concerns had been expressed by residents and businesses alike regarding the increase street begging in the town centre, not all of whom were homeless; shoplifting had also significantly increased, and the lack of police presence in the town centre emboldened the behaviour. Sgt Franklin had expressed his own concerns regarding Neighbourhood Police Teams being deployed to assist in other areas at the expense of community policing. Guidance and support continued to be offered by partner agencies to street beggars/those claiming to be homeless, and that request for the change in legislation regarding supported/exempt accommodation was very much needed.

Jordan Westcarr, ASB Intervention Officer, Community Partnership Team briefly advised of his role and the interventions, help, support and guidance offered to rough sleepers, street beggars working alongside key partner agencies, including the local police teams.

Residents advised of an increase in incidents, including anti-social behaviour and acts of criminality around the towpath area; a recent incident including the victim being hospitalised following being attacked by perpetrators using with bottles and bricks. The incident had been reported to the police and to the local schools as most of the incidents occurred when school aged children were hanging around the area. Many residents were now reluctant to use the towpath to access Millennium Green and were fearful of reprisals as several of the alleged perpetrators were known locally.

A bollard preventing vehicular /quad and motorcycle access had also been removed; temporary work had been carried out to the tarmac, but the bollard needed to be replaced as soon as possible. Cllr Harmer agreed to investigate.

- Acocks Green Carnival – 50th Anniversary Event to take place on Saturday 1st July and attended by the Lord Mayor. The event was open to all.

- No Mow May – several residents had welcomed the idea and reasons behind the initiative, however, since normal services had been resumed, the grass cutting/mowing had been very poor, no litter-picking had been carried out prior to mowing and cuttings had not been collected.

Several grass verges and open spaces were still left uncut – Malvern Road was particularly bad.

Cllr Harmer advised that a review of No Mow May had been requested as the initiative had not gone to plan; play areas were left uncut, leaving children/young people unable to use them; grassed areas on housing land were also left untouched along with some

roundabouts, which affected driving visibility.

- Roberts Road – ongoing problems with obstructive parking, blocked driveways and dropped kerbs, and cars being driven in the wrong direction down the one-way system. Drug-dealing had also increased significantly, with cannabis being used openly and polluting the air. Complaints had been made to Housing Officers as most of the alleged nuisance was linked to a council property, however the nuisance was still ongoing and very little action appeared to be taken. Residents had repeatedly asked for residents parking scheme which would help with reducing the number of cars parked on the road as only one permit per household would be issued.

Cllr Harmer explained that residents' only parking schemes were costly to implement and often quite contentious as not all residents were in favour, especially where there was more than one vehicle in the household and nor permit issued for visitors. Parking was an ongoing problem citywide and there would never be enough parking spaces to accommodate the number of cars on the road – viable alternatives needed to be considered and drivers encouraged to consider them, including a carshare system or renting a vehicle as and when needed. In the meantime, residents must continue to report incidents to the local police team and Housing Officers, and where the road or driveway was blocked or obstructed, take a picture or video recording of the obstruction as supporting evidence - if it was safe to do so.

- Former Care Home in breach of planning application – matter currently being investigated by Planning Enforcement.

Honorary Alderman and former Councillor Jim Whorwood

Tributes were paid to Honorary Alderman, former Councillor and Lord Mayor Jim Whorwood who had recently passed away and had served Acocks Green Ward between 1994 – 2004.

4. Date of Next Meeting

Weds 13th September 2023, 7pm – 8.30pm, Fox Hollies Forum.

Meeting closed at 8.30pm