

**NOTES OF THE ASTON WARD MEETING HELD ON 2 NOVEMBER 2017 AT  
6.30PM AT NEWTOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE, NEWBURY ROAD**

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

Inspector Iftekhhar Ahmed & Sergeant Scott Edwards  
Ken Brown, Neighbourhood Development & Support Officer  
Pat Whyte, Neighbourhood Development & Support Officer  
Kay Thomas, Community Governance Manager

There were 100+ residents also in attendance

**1. Notice of recordings** – Noted

**2. Apologies** – none

**3. Update from Police**

Inspector Ahmed gave the following update;

- Aston was a priority area and had been awarded more resources to meet challenges
- Crimes had increased this year compared to the same time last year by 400 (20%) which was in line with national figures
- Challenges included gun crime, gangs and drugs.
- Preventative work continued through links with schools, temples, mosques and churches.
- Residents input and reporting was vital to gathering evidence
- The local team should consist of 10 officers but 6 were currently allocated. A request for additional officers had been made.
- It was noted that police tasking meetings were no longer being held. The Inspector highlighted the community work undertaken across the ward and the groups that did meet. He encouraged residents to advise the team of these meetings and where possible combine meetings so that members of the team could attend.

**4. Local Innovation Fund**

Ken Brown introduced the Local Innovation Fund process and that the following groups would be presenting their ideas.

a) Youth in Aston, Aston Park Youth Diversionary Hub

Pritesh Pattni and Harun Raza outlined the proposal to work with partners through sport and mentoring to provide opportunities for young people. A

successful project had been run during the summer in Aston Park in conjunction with the police in response to anti-social behaviour and funding was needed to help the project undertake more activities to help young people and the issues they were currently facing. Activities were run with the aid of volunteers and the young people engaged on the schemes became volunteers and were offered qualifications in coaching, first aid etc. An application for funding had been made to the Home Office to raise awareness of knife crime but additional LIF funding was required to extend the programmes that the group wanted to provide for the young people of Aston.

b) 29+ Health and Work

Zulfigar Khan outlined the project idea from GHC to support people 29+ into employment and in particular where health issues are creating a barrier to work. The team was employed from the locality, based in Witton but worked across Aston and Perry Barr. The 29+ group was often a neglected group and the team worked with other professionals to offer support around health issues, redundancy etc to improve CV writing, interview skills, job search but also support once in employment. In response to a question Zulfigar gave a commitment that if funded 100% of the money received would be used in Aston.

c) Aston Heritage Volunteers & Library

Liz Parkes, Library Manager presented a joint idea on behalf of Aston Heritage volunteers, West Midlands Fire Service and the Library Service to create a heritage centre and community hub in Aston Fire Station. Alongside this Aston library wanted to provide a service from the building. The building would offer community space, a 'fab lab' for new businesses/entrepreneurs as well as maintaining the Grade II Listed Building and offering an insight into how the Fire Service worked. Volunteer opportunities would be created in the 'hub' and the library and health & wellbeing would be promoted. Benefits to the local community would include – free community space, work with faith leaders, business space, extended library service, community café and hot desk space. The Fire Service would refurbish the building and the community café would provide income.

d) Market Place

Hermin McIntosh explained the proposal for a market space at the site of the Mohammed Ali Centre but understood that the councillors were not supportive of the idea. The Chair advised that the location was outside the ward boundary and the benefit to Aston residents was therefore questionable. Also the proposal was conditional on the clearance and making good of the site and given the timescale for spending the LIF funding it was not felt there would be sufficient time for the market place to become established.

Hermin stated that the City Council had given £50,000 to clear the site. The site was on the boundary of wards and would be for all communities as an open event. In response to concerns regarding the clearance of the site the meeting was assured that Kajans had £50,000 from the city council and £10,000 from lottery funding and it was intended to clear the site with that funding to enable the event to go ahead. Soho Ward had awarded £6,000. The proposal was outlined and details of the proposed open air festival incorporating experienced partners in festival management, local food businesses, arts and music were presented. The festival would run every weekend from May to October at a cost of £35,000, £16,000 of which had already been raised and Soho and Aston wards were being asked to contribute.

It was noted that more information was awaited from 2 proposals discussed at the previous meeting and that there were further proposals due to be submitted that needed to be sent to Ken Brown within the next 2 weeks.

Reference was made to the S106 money from the Tesco development and that £86,000 was available to encourage people into work. **Action: The Chair asked that the responsible officer be invited to the next meeting to explain the current situation with the S106 money.**

- **It was agreed to support 29+ Health and Youth in Aston, Diversionary Hub (£9,500 to each)**
- **New proposals to be submitted within the next 2 weeks and a further ward meeting to be arranged for them to be presented.**

## **5. Youth Service Update – defer to next meeting**

## **6. Residents Issues**

### **a) Barry Jackson Tower**

Approximately 100 residents attended the meeting to express in the strongest possible terms their opposition to the decision to stop the demolition of Barry Jackson Tower and convert it to a centre for temporary accommodation for homeless people.

The following main points were made by residents to support their opposition;

- Aston already had a high number of properties offering hostel accommodation to vulnerable people and the community could not support the strain this would have on resources in the area and the

impact on community cohesion and safety due to the transient nature of the proposed residents for Barry Jackson Tower.

- Properties in Burbury Street had been earmarked for demolition but had instead been left to rehouse the homeless and since that occurred there had been vandalism, car damage, bins set alight and extensive vandalism to the centre in Burbury Park requiring police and fire service to be called. This had not occurred prior to the change in occupancy of the properties. Therefore it was not surprising that residents feared more of the same if Barry Jackson Tower was used as a Supported Living Centre.
- Crime rates in Aston were already high and the area could not tolerate more vulnerable people adding to the issues
- There had been no consultation with neighbouring residents in respect of the change of decision relating to Barry Jackson Tower
- Workmen had already begun work on the tower block and therefore it appeared that the decision had been taken and acted upon without any form of local consultation
- The homeless crisis in the City was not in doubt or the need for emergency accommodation and the meeting was advised that a youth group, Create, had put together a business plan to transform a city centre premises into the same type of accommodation proposed for Barry Jackson Tower. This plan meant that the premises would have no near neighbours. The City Council had not supported this idea but had used the idea itself.
- There had been a meeting attended by housing officers and residents on 14 October when it had been said that a decision had been made for planning permission to be sought for the changes to the tower block and a time scale for the permission was requested. It was also queried whether Health & Safety officers had approved the block as fit contractors to work in or for habitation.
- Although at the meeting on 14 October officers had said the tower block was not intended as a hostel all of the measures and management proposals that had been talked about were the same as those put in place for hostel accommodation.
- There were 19 hostels in the Aston ward although the figures held by the City Council were incorrect and details were being sent to the Cabinet Member so that this could be rectified. Barry Jackson Tower could accommodate 320 people – could this number not be more evenly spread across the city?
- A tower block was not the best place for vulnerable people to be accommodated
- Residents had suffered enough when Barry Jackson Tower was previously occupied and had been promised demolition of the tower blocks and new homes to be built. Spending millions of pounds on

temporary accommodation and a building with a restricted life span appeared a waste of money when it could be spent on building proper homes.

- An assurance was sought from the three councillors that the strength of feeling felt by residents was supported by the councillors and that they would take the opposition voiced back to the Cabinet Member on residents behalf and fight alongside them to ensure that Barry Jackson Tower was demolished as promised.
- It was felt that there was a disconnection between residents and their elected members and that the councillors did not share the same strength of feeling as residents and therefore there was concern that the opposition to this decision would not be fed back to the Cabinet Member in the way residents would expect. In particular the issue around the lack of consultation.
- Residents advised they were compiling a petition and were meeting with the Opposition Group Leader the following morning.

The Chair reiterated at various times throughout the debate the councillors support for the community and that they did not support the change of decision for the future of Barry Jackson Tower. He advised he had met with the Cabinet Member and Director of Housing to discuss his concerns and would be forwarding all of the concerns expressed at this meeting to the Cabinet Member with a request that the work cease on the tower block and pointing out the lack of consultation with residents. The Chair undertook to present the petition at City Council meeting on 7 November as this was the best platform and resident could attend the meeting to ensure it was received. He also undertook to arrange a meeting with the Leader of the City Council to bring to his attention the strength of feeling about the decision and that it did not have the support of the 3 councillors. The Chair acknowledged that residents had suffered previously when Barry Jackson Tower was occupied and that demolition had been agreed so that houses could be built on the site.

Councillor Islam said that he had arranged the public meeting and opposed the decision to change Barry Jackson Tower into a Supported Living Centre and said he was also willing to present the petition at the City Council meeting. He concurred with the comments made by the Chair and added his support to the community.

Resident concluded by voicing their strong opposition to the decision to convert Barry Jackson Tower into a Supported Living Centre and demanded that the strength of feeling about this be relayed by the councillors to the Cabinet Member and that the councillors support the community.

#### b) Closure of Newtown Community Centre

Several local residents and users of the Centre expressed their concerns at the proposed closure of the Centre in March 2018. Two groups currently using the Centre said they did not know what their future held and had not been given any information despite having used the Centre for 5 and 7 years respectively. The Schools that operated from Newtown Community Centre provided a vital local service and if forced to close there would be no engagement with local young people and the community would be adversely impacted.

The Chair explained that it had been the intention to have a new pool in Ladywood and when that opened Newtown would be closed. However there had been no news about the progress of that pool and therefore he was not certain of the future of Newtown Community Centre. The Chair added that it had been made clear that Newtown Community Centre was the only resource in the area and therefore the redevelopment should include a community centre.

The schools asked for some clear direction on the future so that an alternative location could be found.

In response to a question the Chair said that no contractor had taken over the site.

The schools queried if they could bid to take over the building. The Chair supported a CAT and reiterated that a community facility must be included in the redevelopment of the site.

Meeting ended at 9.40pm