

**NOTES OF THE ASTON WARD MEETING HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2017 AT
6.30PM AT NEWTOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE, NEWBURY ROAD**

Present: Councillor Muhammad Afzal & Councillor Ziaul Islam

P.C Paul Bieliauskas, West Midlands Police
Pete Hobbs, Service Head, Private Rented Sector
Craig Rowbottom, Development Planning Manager
Pat Whyte, Community Development & Support Officer
Kay Thomas, Community Governance Manager
There were 22 residents also in attendance

1. **Election of a Chair** – Councillor Muhammad Afzal elected as Chair for 2016/17
2. **Notice of recordings** – Noted
3. **Apologies** – Councillor Nagina Kauser
4. **Update from Police**

PC Bieliauskas gave the following update;

- Following changes to the WMP the emphasis was now on neighbourhood policing and Aston now had a dedicated team.
- Year on year crime figures reported a slight rise of 17%, mainly burglaries, robberies and violent crime around domestic violence incidents.
- Residents information was vital in reducing crime
- Vehicle crime had reduced
- A number of drug and firearms warrants had been issued & 40 cannabis factories had been discovered in the area. Residents were urged to call Crime Stoppers 0800 555111 if they considered anything suspicious.
- He was working with voluntary organisations eg, church groups & Aston Villa to encourage young people off the streets and away from ASB
- A Public Space Protection Order for Hockley estate, Great Hampton Row was due to come into force on 23 January.
- Residents encouraged to sign up to WMNow, mobile phone app to receive information from the police relevant to the area.
- PC Joe Cahill, officer in Aston for over 20 years had received an MBE

Residents then made the following comments;

- There had been a recent incident in Freer Road in relation to terrorism involving a neighbour and the police. The neighbour had been roughly searched by armed police and although the allegation had been unfounded there had been no apology forthcoming. PC Bieliauskas undertook to investigate and report back to the residents.
- Work with Aston Villa was welcomed but similar schemes for Birchfield School were required. PC Bieliauskas advised PCSO John Allen or Mike Winter at Aston Villa be contacted for information.

The Chair queried the increase in robberies and was advised year to date there had been an additional 29 offences, mostly chain snatches. Police were working with the Lozells & Perry Barr teams with both covert and overt operations.

Action:-

PC Bieliauskas to investigate issues relating to incident in Freer Road and respond to the residents

5. Local Innovation Fund

Pat Whyte provided a brief update on the criteria for proposals for the Local Innovation Fund, the process for spend and the possible match funding opportunities available. Councillor Islam advised the allocation was a one-off amount to be spent by March 2018.

The meeting was advised that a group had a proposal around a domestic violence project and it was suggested that other projects should focus on young people, especially young girls and mental health issues.

The need for communication between groups to enable cross working was highlighted and so that match funding could be sought. In view of the amount of money available the ward needed to act smartly to ensure that community groups did not end up all bidding for the money. The way of identifying who was involved, how groups would be identified and the way forward needed to be addressed.

Maria Holloway, Birmingham MIND Locality Manager in response to comments made about the need for a mental health project advised of the innovative way that MIND had been delivering mental health services, locality based with Connect Groups accessed without referral. It was hoped to empower people attending the workshops to set up their own satellites/hubs and break down the stigma. She welcomed working with the community.

Pat therefore suggested that a further meeting be arranged to specifically look at the Local Innovation Fund to enable groups to have a conversation about priorities, how to work for the whole of the ward and how groups could work together. It was suggested that a form be sent out for people to note their priorities for the ward.

Action:-

- a) **Further meeting to be arranged to specifically discuss the Local Innovation Fund**
- b) **Those in attendance and relevant partners to be invited**
- c) **Ward priority form, to form basis of discussion, to be sent out prior to the LIF meeting.**

6. Residents Issues

a) Proliferation of hostels in the area – issue raised by Perry Aston Residents Association

The Chair of the Perry Aston Residents Association raised the issue of the number of hostels opening in the area and the nuisance this was causing to residents.

Pete Hobbs advised that Aston was not the only ward to have raised this issue. The private rented sector was growing and the number of hostel type accommodation properties was also growing and as they often housed vulnerable people requiring support this impacted on the wider community. The City Council licensed private landlords for properties that were 3 storeys or more and housed 5+ people but were not registered providers. Residents were asked to advise the Private Rented Sector Team of any such properties that were not licensed. Properties managed by registered providers had been raised as a concern at the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership Board where support was not being provided as it should and policies were being put in place. Pete Hobbs provided his contact details – 675 7936/ pete.hobbs@birmingham.gov.uk

A consultation was being proposed on selective licensing in Birmingham which would cover 11 wards where there were high concentrations of privately rented property. Aston was not one of the wards based on figures from the last census but this information was probably out of date and therefore residents were urged to take part in the consultation. Officers could only act on information provided and residents, police & fire service were asked for details.

Craig Rowbottom explained the planning policy for hostels which included the impact on an area and information from the police. The policy was

about to be updated and Craig undertook to ensure the ward was consulted. If residents had concerns regarding a planning consent they should contact the enforcement team.

The Chair of Perry Aston Residents Association referenced the 3 most recent planning applications that had been approved for hostels were for the same road. Numerous objections had been submitted to the application for Aston Hotel and despite some amendments being made it had been approved. The councillors had supported the application but there had been widespread objection from the community and approval at Planning Committee had not been unanimous. The registered provider was unknown and despite the application making reference to work with Trident and Midland Heart Housing Associations, on investigation neither knew about the hostel. The stained glass had been removed despite claims it would be retained and the façade of the building had been ruined.

Craig advised that work had been undertaken with the police resulting in a second application. The views of the councillors and community had been taken into account but the decision had rested with the Planning Committee who had to relate to planning considerations.

b) Aston Library

Reference made to proposal to close Aston Library and a petition that had been started in favour of retaining it. Consideration should be given to finding another building and offering Birchfield as an alternative was not satisfactory due to access and safety. It was suggested that Birchfield Library should become a tier 2 library and the money saved be used for an alternative Aston library.

The Chair concurred with the points raised and said he had put those points to the Deputy Leader who would take them into account. The Chair of Perry Aston Residents Association said it had been Councillor Afzal's perseverance that had retained Aston's libraries so far.

Meeting ended at 8.35pm