

**MEETING WITH CLLR JOHN COTTON  
FRIDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2016  
SELLY OAK LIBRARY**

## **1. Introduction**

Barry welcomed Cllr John Cotton, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Management & Homes, to the meeting.

A brief explanation was given as to why Cllr Cotton had been invited to the meeting. This was to highlight issues surrounding Selly Oak and our need to make it a better place to live.

Everyone was asked to introduce themselves. There were 13 people in attendance mainly representing local community/residential groups but included the three councillors for Selly Oak and University of Birmingham.

Barry said the meeting would commence with a slide presentation followed by a discussion on the issues in Selly Oak, concluding with a walk around some of the roads in the area.

Cllr Cotton introduced himself saying as Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Management & Homes he was working with Housing Birmingham with an agenda to build 60,000 houses and improve existing houses and neighbourhoods – building stronger places to live. The private renting sector was a growing problem.

## **2. Presentation**

The slide presentation commenced with commentary from Barry. This included:

- Selly Oak map showing locations of 21 development sites making it a major development and regeneration area - but none in Bournbrook area
- Statutory Guidelines to assist local authorities
- Map showing high density of HMOs in Selly Oak - especially in Bournbrook area
- Article 4 area covers Gibbins Road
  - concentration of HMOs in 100 metres radius
  - HMO not registered – note number of parked cars outside
- Map pinpointing number of existing student halls and those in development
  - does not address a balance of population/community
- Slides showing properties with unsightly extensions, modifications such as dropped ceilings, blocked up front doors, 'beds in sheds' converted garages
- Dumped waste, rubbish mattresses, furniture thrown on pavements
  - this gets cleared by BCC with a subsidy from public purse
- Traffic and car parking problems
  - no parking provided for student halls so cars left parked on local roads adding to the problem
- Retrospective planning applications
  - work carried out before planning application submitted
- Heritage
  - some buildings could have been listed
  - features on properties removed before PA submitted
- Impact on community
  - shops converted to HMOs
  - residents live constantly in a building site
  - isolation of elderly/families in area - transient student population
- Perception of area
  - newspaper articles describing Selly Oak as favelas, Brazilian slum, student ghetto
  - recent muggings in Selly Oak, 4,000 students complained about safety in area

### 3. Discussion

The discussion began and Cllr Cotton remarked he had been surprised by the changes that had taken place over the last 20 years as he had resided near here then. He said there were statutory powers to assist with issues but these were limited but was pulling all levers available.

Barry asked as to how do we make it happen?

- getting Article 4 in place had been good but did not resolve many of the problems. Some roads seemed to have had a little benefit since its introduction but many still had problems.
- 5,000 leaflets to promote Article 4 had been produced by CP4SO and circulated throughout the whole area to make people aware
- We do an 'All Out Day' usually at end of the University term in July with a walk round the Bournbrook area. Officers from many agencies attended in July 2015, eg. HMRC, Enforcement, Environment, Police, Immigration etc. Actions were taken by some of the agencies.

Several more comments added to the discussion by people at the meeting to expand the issues shown in the slide presentation or how they saw planning matters:

- HMO in Gibbons Road not licensed had been reported but to date nothing had been heard back
- retrospective planning applications with misleading information in applications. It seemed this not checked out so illegal extensions got approval
- planning applications taken on 'face value' of each application - no proper checks or history of landlord/builder looked at
- was mentioned at a Planning Committee meeting manual voting system outdated - automated button system more efficient - received reply back that this was too expensive
- length of time when illegal building work carried out and enforcement action taken - can take around two years

One particular company, Britannia, who own and rent out many properties to students in Selly Oak, got mentioned several times during the discussion. They have enforcements placed on properties but appear to ignore and continue renting.

Barry raised additional licensing as we needed to have something in place - Bournbrook in particular needed this. The Government might be looking to do something but we really need our own now for Selly Oak. Cllr Cotton replied was pressing ahead with additional licensing and it would probably be city-wide to cover all privately rented property.

Other concerns raised in the meeting were:

- Issues with renting agents often ignoring tenants' problems when reported to them. They also appeared not to know who the landlord was or where to contact them. This raised the issue of The HMO Register on the Council's website. It no longer showed the landlords' details and had been removed from the HMO Register due to Privacy and Data Protection etc., but public do need accessibility to this information. It was thought that some councils still had this information on their websites so this needed looking into further.
- Karen said Landlords were complaining about other landlords because of how their property was being affected.
- Concern for Selly Park Conservation Area as BCC Planners recently gave go-ahead for a property in the Conservation Area to be altered to flats housing 57 students. Although Selly Park is part of Article 4 area, this does not cover PBSAs Concern this would lead to further student accommodation in the Conservation Area. There does appear there may be a policy that PBSAs should not be permitted east of Bristol Road. Cllr Cotton replied he would check to see what was in the Draft Student Accommodation SPD

- Students attending other Birmingham universities were now living in student accommodation in Selly Oak exacerbating the problem even further. Karen said Wider Selly Oak SPD refers to this and thinks a city wide policy also that students should be housed near to university that they attend.
- Cllr Cotton said having five universities in Birmingham and large ongoing developments of accommodation for universities meant also a need to have a proper city wide look at the situation in order to provide for other young people attending further education colleges not just those in universities.

Barry thought the discussion should end now – it was 11.10am and the walk round the area needed to commence.