

# Westcotes Community Meeting

**Your Community, Your Voice**

## **Record of Meeting and Actions**

**Tuesday, 6 March 2012**

**Held at: Main Hall, East West Community Project, 10 Wilberforce Road, Leicester LE3 0BG**

**6:00 pm – 7:00 pm:**

**Informal discussion on Community First funding**

***Led by: Councillor Sarah Russell***

**7:00 pm onwards:**

**Formal meeting**

***Led by: Councillor Andy Connelly***

## **6:00 pm – 7:00 pm**

Councillor Sarah Russell led an informal discussion on Community First funding and the way forward.

At the conclusion of this informal session, members of the public were invited to take their seats and take part in the formal session of the meeting.

## **7:00 pm onwards**

### **33. ELECTION OF CHAIR**

It was agreed that Councillor Connelly would Chair the meeting.

### **34. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Russell.

### **35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors were asked to declare any interest they had in the business on the agenda, and/or indicate if Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applied to them.

No such interests were declared.

### **36. DRAFT STUDENT HOUSING SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT**

Ian Jordan, Senior Planner in the City Council's Planning Policy and Design service, introduced himself to the meeting.

He explained that the draft Student Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) had been produced in response to concerns about the amount of large scale purpose built student accommodation being built in the City and the number of properties in multiple occupation. It was hoped that the final document could be adopted in May 2012, but before that was done a period of consultation was being carried out.

The SPD was in two parts. The first of these was the criteria against which new applications for purpose built student accommodation would be considered. There currently was no evidence that capacity for student accommodation had been reached, but officers' professional view was that the City was reaching this point. It therefore was proposed that, in the future, developers could be guided towards using taller buildings in the City centre, where there already was a greater density of buildings.

The second part of the SPD related to shared housing. Government and Leicester City Council policy was that it was not possible to stop properties being changed to shared occupation for up to 6 people. It therefore was proposed that, when the SPD was in place, consultation would be carried out on introducing an Article 4 Direction to prevent properties being changed from family to shared use.

Mike Richardson, Head of Leicester City Council's Planning Management and Delivery service, introduced himself to the meeting and explained that, if the SPD was adopted, it would become the basis for considering future planning applications for large scale student accommodation.

During discussion, it was stated that it appeared that every application for student accommodation was passed. Mike Richardson explained that all planning applications were circulated widely. They also were all publicised, for example by letters to neighbours or officers visiting meetings such as this. For larger applications, public notices were placed in the Leicester Mercury. If any objections to an application were received, or if a Ward Member requested it, an application would be submitted to the Council's Planning and Development Control Committee for decision.

Any applications for student accommodation submitted before the moratorium on such developments introduced in November 2011 would not be subject to the SPD. Officers were not aware of any existing applications that would be subject to the provisions of the SPD.

A resident enquired whether accommodation built for students could be used as general accommodation if there were insufficient students to fill it. In reply, Mike Richardson advised that this would depend on whether the original planning permission had restricted its use to student housing. If this was not the case, under the SPD evidence would be sought that it would be capable of being used for general accommodation.

The following comments and replies were then discussed:-

- *Comment:* Developers were not required to provide green open space for student developments in the same way they would be for general housing.  
*Reply:* Section 2.5 of the proposed SPD placed a duty on developers to meet all amenity provision. This included green open space.
- *Comment:* There were already a lot of high buildings. Therefore, if more accommodation was required, developers could build to the height already existing, but this was higher than buildings used by the rest of the community.  
*Reply:* This should be avoided, as there should not be an over-concentration of students in one area.
- *Comment:* What was meant by "surrounding residential neighbourhood"?  
*Reply:* This would depend on the application, but an area was considered to be greater than one block. The SPD was not specific about this, to avoid problems in the future. Any suggestions for how this could be considered were welcomed.

- *Comment:* More precise definitions needed to be given for terms used in the SPD. The terms as proposed would be interpreted differently by different people. In the past, this had led to the problems being experienced now.  
*Reply:* See above comment and reply.
- *Comment:* Some universities capped the amount of accommodation that could be provided in houses, by limiting the number permitted to live in private dwellings. Was anything similar planned for Leicester?  
*Reply:* The Council had tried to assess the need for student accommodation, but had been hindered by a lack of data for some areas. Where data was available, it was felt that student accommodation was nearing saturation point. However, at present neither the Council or the universities knew whether demand for student accommodation was likely to rise or fall. In addition, if a property had 6 or more people living in it who were not a family it was felt to be a home in multiple occupation and therefore needed to be licensed as such by the local authority.
- *Comment:* Was the Council guaranteeing that there would be no more large student accommodation buildings in the area?  
*Reply:* It was highly unlikely that developers would consider small-scale accommodation, as this would not give them a return on their investment, (unless it was specialised accommodation, such as for people with disabilities). However, large scale development would not be appropriate in this Ward. Developers would be likely to be directed towards the City centre for any such development, in view of the number of large buildings already there and the lower number of immediate neighbours.
- *Comment:* What was current policy on student parking?  
*Reply:* National standards existed for this, which started with the assumption that local authorities should drive down car usage. Consequently, a maximum number of parking spaces was stated and then consideration was given to how this could be reduced, (for example, if the development was near public transport). However, as a result of a change in this policy by the government, the Council's Local Plan would be changed in the summer to move from stating a maximum level to more general parking standards to suit the use of the development proposed.
- *Comment:* Students were temporary residents, so needed vehicles to travel around and could not be forced to not use cars. This made it inappropriate to reduce the number of parking spaces.  
*Reply:* Some developments already prohibited parking on site. The national position was likely to change from starting with a maximum number to each local authority assessing needs for parking based on their individual situations. Officers currently were developing these new standards for the City.
- *Comment:* How were students accounted for within the residents' parking scheme in the Ward?  
*Reply:* It already was a condition of some developments that students could not have permits for the residents' parking scheme. In addition, some individual

student accommodation blocks had tenancy agreements stating that students could not have their own cars there. It was recognised that some people would use their own cars, regardless of what rules were in place.

- *Comment:* Any ways that could be found to tighten existing restrictions on parking would be welcomed.  
*Reply:* This could be done on an individual building basis, although it was recognised that, even if travel plans were in place, students could park their cars away from the building and walk to it. It was considered that parking would be required by 1 in 10 students. Exploring all options, such as old factory sites, could help to identify further parking spaces.
- *Comment:* The development of the Co-op site on Briton Street originally had been for elderly persons, but was now proposed for students. If developments such as this were not controlled properly, a situation could arise whereby accommodation could be let to students that was designed for other users.  
*Reply:* It was likely that this situation would come under the proposed Article 4 Direction, although the exact wording of the Direction would have to be checked before this could be confirmed.
- *Comment:* Any open green space that could be obtained / retained was welcome.
- *Comment:* With student fees increasing significantly in September 2012, a lot of houses that currently accommodated students could no longer be needed for that purpose. They could then change from being houses with no cars to being used by families with several cars.  
*Reply:* This was something over which the Council had no control and the area already had a lot of houses shared by adults who were not students. If a downward trend in the number of students was identified, this would be used as evidence to refuse permission for the future development of student housing.
- *Comment:* Local universities currently were marketing themselves abroad. Foreign students tended to want purpose-built accommodation, rather than shared accommodation, that was close to their campus. This could increase pressure for further developments.
- *Comment:* Changes were being introduced in the housing benefit rules for young single people. In the future, they would be expected to share accommodation, which gave rise to concerns that, if student houses became free, they would be predominantly occupied by a different group of young people, rather than families.
- *Comment:* Police resources already were stretched, so increasing student accommodation would stretch them even further.  
*Reply:* The police anticipated that this would be challenging. In view of the volume of students in the area due to recent and possible future developments, the Ward Councillors had asked to meet the Police to discuss how students often were the target of crime.

- *Comment:* Alternative routes that students could use should be identified and they should be warned not to use the parks at night.  
*Reply:* This already was done and warning signs had been put up.
- *Comment:* If developers were not providing green spaces, they could be asked to contribute to an increased police presence.  
*Reply:* This already had been tried in another area of the City, but the developer had refused. Developer contributions were for capital and/or infrastructure projects, not running costs, so such contributions could not be insisted on.
- *Comment:* Would Council Tax be paid on purpose-built accommodation?  
*Reply:* The District Valuer set a value on all properties. Students were exempt from paying Council Tax, but the owners of the property paid business rates.
- *Comment:* Bus services had been reduced significantly over the last year, especially at evenings and weekends. Any pressure that could be put on bus companies to reverse this trend would be welcome.  
*Reply:* The Council stipulated that new student accommodation had to be within a 10 minute walk of the university. This was another reason why developments were encouraged to be in the City centre. Some bus services had been subsidised by the County Council. Although some of these subsidies had been withdrawn, some services had continued. The problem faced by the Council with this was that it did not regulate bus services.
- *Comment:* What sort of evidence was used to demonstrate need?  
*Reply:* Some examples had been included in Appendix B to the SPD. The main criterion was that any situation was looked at as a whole, not just the individual aspects of it.

It was noted that:-

- Comments on the draft SPD could be submitted in writing or by e-mail by 14 March 2012. Alternatively, comments could be passed to the Ward Councillors, who would pass them on to officers; and
- When the consultation period on the Article 4 Direction started, this would be publicised.

On behalf of the meeting, the Chair thanked Ian Jordan and Mike Richardson for attending the meeting and for a very helpful discussion.

### **37. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

#### **a) Next Meeting**

Residents were reminded that the next ordinary Westcotes Community Meeting would be held on Tuesday 20 March 2012.

**b) Meet the Mayor Event**

It was noted that the City Mayor and the Assistant City Mayors would be holding a Meet the Mayor event outside Westcotes Library between 12.00 noon and 1.00 pm on Saturday 17 March 2012. All residents were welcome to attend and raise questions and/or issues.

**38. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm