

Braunstone Park & Rowley Fields Community Meeting

Your Community, Your Voice

Record of Meeting and Actions

5:30 pm, Tuesday, 16 April 2013

Held at: The Oak Centre, Bendbow Rise, Leicester, LE3 1QA

Who was there:

Councillor Michael Cooke

Councillor Anne Glover

Councillor Wayne Naylor

INFORMATION SHARING – ‘INFORMATION FAIR’ SESSION

Information on the following topics was available in the room:

- Bioblitz Event on Aylestone Meadows
- Housing Issues
- City Warden Service
- Community Safety
- Ward Councillors and general enquiries

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.

60. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councillor Cooke was elected as Chair and welcomed everyone to the Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields Community Meeting.

61. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Anita Robinson, Parks Officer, the Police, Alcohol Awareness and Adel Al-Salloum from Spark Arts for Children.

62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Naylor declared an Other Disclosable Interest in respect of the Community Meeting Budget and the funding application from Angels and Monsters, as he was a committee member of that group.

63. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields Community Meeting held on 19 February 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

64. COUNCILLORS' UPDATE

The Chair provided an update of the issues that the Ward Councillors had been dealing with. These included the following:

Health Strategy

A Health Provider's Group was being formed and would be meeting during week beginning 22 April 2013. Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields had some of the worst health issues in the city; people experienced poorer health and had a lower life expectancy than in other parts of the city. Efforts were being made to find ways and initiatives to help local people. These would include ways to increase the local availability of fresh food and also to utilise agricultural and open space land to benefit local people.

Hockley Farm Medical Centre

There was good news in respect of the Hockley Farm Medical Centre. Historically there had been many problems there, including numerous difficulties experienced by patients when trying to make an appointment to see a doctor. The situation there was very much improved and Hockley Farm was now the bench mark for other medical centres.

Braunstone Hall

In respect of Braunstone Hall, it was hoped that the Bat Survey issues would be resolved in May, after which things could then move forward.

Riverside football pitches

Contractors had been working on the football pitches but too much of the pitch had been removed, leaving behind a muddy surface. There was still therefore a great deal of work to be done.

65. UPDATE ON HOUSING ISSUES IN THE WARD

Ellen Watts, Area Manager, Housing provided an update on local housing issues. Ellen made the following points:

- Every year there was money in the Environment Budget to spend on projects in the estate.
- During the previous year, 12 empty 3 bedroom properties had been converted by moving a downstairs bathroom upstairs into one of the bedrooms. This had resulted in additional 2 bedroom properties, which were very much in demand. Councillors commented that it had been suggested that this initiative should be extended to other wards.
- Properties in Hand Avenue and Braunstone Lane had their fencing replaced with brick walls. Councillors commented that the new brick walls looked much nicer and transformed the area.
- Radiators had been installed in porches in some properties.

A further £110,000 had been allocated for local environmental projects for the current financial year. From this fund it was hoped:

- to convert a further 12 empty properties as there was still a shortage of 2 bedroom properties.
- Install handrails in Blackmore Drive to help the elderly.
- Improve lighting and fencing to prevent fly tipping.
- to help improve an area of land which could be used to grow food to benefit the local community.

Ellen added that officers in Housing had also helped people in council and private housing to get their homes clad as an energy saving initiative.

The meeting heard that staff were making every effort to address issues and concerns relating to the Welfare Reform Act. Ellen asked that people contact staff at the Housing Office if they were worried about the changes, as staff would do their best to help.

A comment was made that the walkway in Hand Avenue needed attention as the surface was breaking up.

Concerns were also raised relating to properties where there was an on-going problem with condensation on the windows. Ellen explained that this was probably due to damaged window seals and these could be replaced.

66. HOW TO PAY COUNCIL TAX AND HOUSING RENTS FOLLOWING CHANGES TO THE WELFARE RIGHTS SCHEME IN APRIL 2013

Suzanne Collins, Property Lettings Manager and Mike Watson, Income Collection Manager delivered a presentation which explained the different ways that people could pay their council rent and tax. A printed copy of the presentation was circulated at the meeting and is also attached to the back of these minutes.

The meeting heard that there were various methods available:

- Direct debit: Suzanne explained that this was the easiest and cheapest way to pay, both for the council and for the payee.
- Online
- Paypoint
- Debit or Credit Card
- Post Office
- Post
- Standing Order

The meeting heard that a new initiative had been introduced in the form of a Credit Union Budget Account (CUBA) which was administered through Clockwise. This was a transactional account whereby people agreed to have their benefit or salary paid into the account, and money was separated out for rent and council tax, so the account holder could only access the remainder. As part of the scheme, people could opt for a pre-paid debit card which could be loaded with a set amount of money on a bi-monthly or monthly basis. Money and budgeting advice was available to all members. Membership was free for LCC tenants who were affected by the welfare reforms.

There was some discussion as to what would happen if people did not pay their rent or council tax. The meeting heard that if someone did not pay their rent and ignored reminders, they could be taken to court and evicted from their home. In such a situation, they may be deemed to be intentionally homeless and the council may therefore have no duty to re-house. Non-payment of council tax could result in an attachment to earnings, bailiff action or even bankruptcy. Concern was expressed as to whether people with learning difficulties would be able to understand and cope with the new system.

A member of the community commented that following the introduction of the 'bedroom tax' people were looking to down size but there were insufficient small properties to meet the need. In response to a query, Councillors explained that people were not permitted to convert a council house to a smaller number of bedrooms themselves, but they could apply to be moved to a smaller property, but this may be in a different part of the city. The point was raised that most people wanted to remain within their own community where they may have lived for many years.

A member of the community commented that some houses had very small bedrooms. The Chair acknowledged that this was a concern and explained that the Assistant City Mayor for Housing would be asking the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Commission to look into this issue in more detail.

In response to a question, Mike explained that at the moment, the changes that were being introduced did not affect pensioners.

Suzanne and Mike were thanked for attending the meeting.

67. BIOBLITZ EVENT

Richard Kelly, Leicester City Council, Assistant Nature Conservation Officer informed members of the community about a BioBlitz event that was scheduled to take place on Aylestone Meadows on 17th and 18th May. Richard explained that the BioBlitz would be an excellent and fun event, with a variety of activities including the following:

- A 24 hour survey to record as many species as possible. There would be prizes for the most species.

- A family fun day on 18th May.
- Bell Boat tours
- A torchlight bat, amphibian and moth night-wander
- Trees and woodlands diseases walk and talk
- Morn chorus guided bird walk
- Wildlife talks and guided walks

Richard asked that anyone interested in volunteering at the event should talk to him.

68. EVENTS IN PARKS IN THE WARD

The meeting heard that there would be brass band concerts in Braunstone Park on the following dates:

Sunday 23 June 2013 from 2.00 – 3.00 pm, and
 Sunday 8 September from 3.00 – 4.00 pm.

A member of the community advised that a whole range of brass band concerts had been planned in Leicester City Council parks between June and September. The concerts were free to attend and further details could be viewed on the council website at:

<http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council-services/lc/parks-greenspaces/whatson/bands-on-parks/>

69. ALCOHOL AWARENESS

The presentation on alcohol awareness did not take place as the officers involved were not able to attend the community meeting.

70. CITY WARDEN SERVICE

Noel Cazley, the City Warden for Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields delivered an update on street scene enforcement issues in the area. Noel made the following points:

- A big clean up event had taken place and it was hoped to hold more clean-ups in the ward, but more volunteers would be very much appreciated.
- Information on the location of 'grot spots' in the ward, would be very welcome.

A member of the community commented that there were rats in the spinney at the back of Pilkington Road. Noel pointed out that the spinney was housing land and therefore the query was directed to Ellen Watts, Area Housing Manager.

A further query was raised relating to an overgrown strip of grassland on Hand Avenue, which needed cutting. Noel responded that he would raise that with the Park's officers.

- It was intended to carry out a leaflet drop in Hand Avenue to provide residents with information on recycling and the collection of large items of waste.
- Bins on streets – staff had been working very hard to address this problem on Narborough Road, Winchester Avenue and Imperial Avenue. Noel reported that the streets were now much improved.
- Dog fouling – increased patrols of staff in plain clothes, and round the clock patrols were being carried out in attempts to catch the people who allowed their dogs to foul. However, the issue of dog fouling was causing very significant problems for residents.

A resident raised a concern that people were not using orange bags for recycling. She reported a problem that some rolls of orange bags did not have the re-order sticker so people did not know how to request a new roll of orange bags. The meeting heard that in such circumstances, a handwritten note stuck on the orange bag, requesting more recycling bags would suffice.

71. POLICE ISSUES UPDATE

Louise Lavelle from the Leicester City Council, Community Safety Team provided an update on the current situation with the alleyway on Cort Crescent. Following problems with anti-social behaviour there, some residents had asked for the alleyway to be closed off. As the alleyway was on housing land, Ellen Watts, Area Manager, Housing had arranged for a gate to be installed, but other residents had complained as they wanted the alleyway to remain open. Louise explained that officers were working hard to resolve the situation.

72. WARD COMMUNITY BUDGET 2013/14

The Chair presented the community meeting budget.

The following funding applications had been fast tracked for payment:

Project ref 1677 : St Peter's Braunstone Flower Festival

Amount approved: £500

Applicant: Rev'd Chris Burch

Project ref 1678 : International Food Festival

Amount approved: £500

Applicant: Manor House Community Association

Project ref: 1679 Manor House Holiday Club

Amount approved: £500

Applicant: Manor House Community Association

Project 1681: Workshops for young parents under 20

Amount approved: £350

Applicant: Angels and Monsters

RESOLVED:

that it be noted that the following items had been fast tracked for payment

The Chair then presented the following funding applications:

Project ref: 1682 Financial Healthcheck Service

Amount requested: £1780

Applicant: Checkpoint Advice and Support

The meeting heard that Checkpoint Advice and Support would be holding weekly sessions and running benefit checks to ensure that people were receiving the benefits they were entitled too.

RESOLVED:

that the application be supported to the value of £1780

The following funding applications had been received after the agenda had been finalised:

Project ref 1676: Fitness Classes, Health Screening and Fitness Testing

Amount requested: £500

Applicant: Sanchez Allen-Coltman, the Braunstone Grove

Funding was requested to deliver fitness bases classes in the form of circuit classes for women in Braunstone. Nutritional advice and fitness tests would be offered to track the participant's well-being and progress. The funding would enable the applicant to get the necessary equipment to support the programme and to develop and extend it from the focussed women's sessions to also providing generic fitness screening, offering one to one personal training and small group sessions, to the general public.

Fitness testing/health screening would also be available to the general public by prior arrangement. This would also be free of charge and would include blood pressure and body fat reading/weight and height measurements / BM1 / resting heart rate and a 3 minute step box fitness test to measure aerobic (cardiovascular) fitness levels.

Funding to pay for a variety of equipment including a blood pressure monitoring kit, body fat monitor, first aid box (sports) height measure standing, medicine ball set, barbells kettle bells, air dome and also publicity and materials.

RESOLVED:

that the application be supported in full to the value of £500.

Project ref 1680: Splash Disco

Amount requested: £1800 - joint bid to Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields/ New Parks and Western Park

Applicant: Splash Disco / Steve Smedley

Funding was requested for new inflatables for the Splash Discos that take place at New Parks Leisure Centre and the Braunstone Leisure Centre throughout the school holidays. They have been running for 15 years and the inflatables are starting to become unsafe for the children to use. The events attract parents, toddlers and children of all ages - a typical Splash Disco day will attract around 100 people. Of the 100 people who attend the sessions at Braunstone Leisure Centre, approximately 80% will come from Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields.

Funding is requested for a space ship inflatable, speakers, blower and music.

RESOLVED:

that the application be supported to the value of £600

Project ref 1683: Big Spring Clean on Braunstone Park

Amount requested: £250

Applicant: Braunstone Clean Up Group - Anita Robinson in conjunction with the Braunstone Residents' Network Committee (part of b-inspired).

Funding was requested for a Big Spring Clean on Braunstone Park to take place on 8 May 2013. The group intend to freshen up some of the furniture such as bollards,

the pent stock chamber and height barriers to give a fresh look. A general litter pick will take place and the brook along Braunstone Avenue will be cleared of any debris.

The Probation Team will also come onto the park the day before to prepare the bridge opposite Gallards Hill on Cort Crescent for painting.

It is hoped to offer all the volunteers a small buffet at the end of the session as a thank you for their efforts.

RESOLVED:

that the funding application be supported in full to the value of £250

The Chair explained that after the above funding applications had been supported there would be approximately £14000 remaining in the Community Meeting budget for 2013/14.

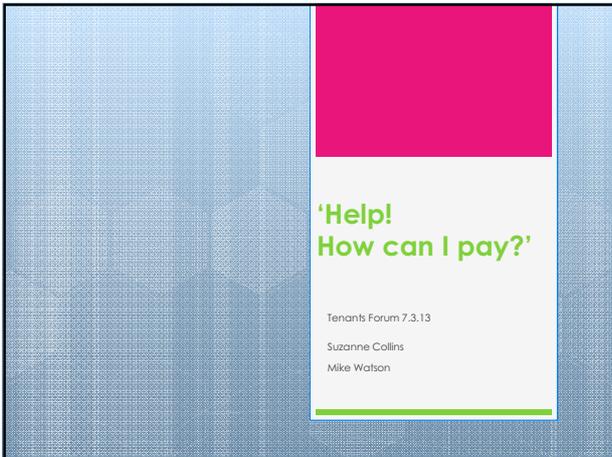
Action to be taken	Officer identified	Deadline
For the funding applications that had been supported, be submitted to the Assistant City Mayor for Community Involvement for approval.	Surinder Singh, Member Support Officer	As soon as possible

73. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair announced that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 11 June 2013 in a venue to be confirmed.

74. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.29 pm.



Contents

- Background
- How can I pay? - Methods of payment
 - Rent and Council tax
- Whats New? Credit Union Budget Account.
- What happens if I don't pay?
- Important points to consider.
- What if I honestly can't afford to pay?
- Where can I get help and advice?

Background

- There are many Government changes affecting tenants and other LCC customers from April 2013 onwards as well as the wider rising costs of living affecting all.
- These changes such as the bedroom tax, benefit cap, universal credit and council tax changes will potentially reduce the amount of income that people have and impact on their ability to pay their rent and council tax.
- Budgeting for your bills and essential living costs is therefore more important than ever.

How can I pay?

- Various methods available:
 - Direct Debit
 - Online
 - Paypoint
 - Debit or Credit Card
 - Post Office
 - Post
 - Standing Order

Direct Debit is Best



- This is the **easiest and cheapest** way to pay for you and us.
- Bank/building society does all the work.
- Choice of dates – for rent, 1st and 15th of each month, for Council Tax 1st, 10th, 20th, 28th of each month.
- 14 days notice of when your bank account will be debited and by how much.
- Guaranteed a full and immediate refund from your bank if anything goes wrong.
- You can cancel the DD at any time, you stay in control.
- No queues, cheques or stamps required.
- The same mandate carries on each year.
- Sign up by phone or fill in a form.
- Forms available on request from Council Tax Wellington House 0116 252 7005 and the Tenants Advice and Repairs Service 0116 252 7007.

Pay On Line



- You can pay on line using Switch, Solo, Delta, Visa, Master Card or JCB Card.
- You'll need your debit or credit card and the right information (account or invoice number) for the service you are paying for.
- The LCC web site has a button called 'Pay It' you just need to choose the correct button for what you want to pay for.
- If you don't have access to a computer at home or via a friend or family member there is access to computers at libraries, some community centres and local Housing Offices also have kiosks with card payment facilities.

PayPoint



- You can pay in cash at any outlet showing the PayPoint logo.
- There are hundreds of places in Leicester and thousands nationally.
 - Includes newsagents, convenience stores, supermarkets and garages. Some open 24hrs 7 days a week.
- Pay where you want.
- Pay when you want.
- At no extra cost to you.
- Details of local outlets can be found at the PayPoint website.

Debit or Credit Card



- A secure answer phone service 0116 252 7012 available 24 hours a day 7 days a week.
- Switch (Maestro) and Delta debit cards and most credit cards.
- You will need your card details and Council Tax account number or rent account number from your bill ready.
- Payment will be credited to your account usually within 1 working day.
- No charge or minimum payment required for debit or credit card payments.

At the Post Office



- You can also pay at any Post Office branch.
- You can find your local branch using the Post Office website.

By Post



- You can pay by posting a cheque which should be made payable to: **Leicester City Council**
- Write your council tax account number or rent account number on the back of your cheque, along with your address.
- Post the cheque to:

Leicester City Council
Cash Office
PO Box 9190
Wellington House
22-32 Wellington Street
Leicester. LE1 8DE

Standing Order



- You can pay by standing order which is easier than paying by post or cash.
- Print off a standing order form from our website, or ask for a form by E mailing, phoning us or visiting the Wellington Street address or calling Tenant Advice and Repairs Service on 0116 2527007
- Send the completed form to your bank or building society** - not us.
- Set your payment date for 5 days before the due date shown on your bill. This will ensure payment is received and put on your account on time and will avoid any unnecessary payment reminders being sent to you.

Whats New! CUBA - Credit Union Budget Account



- What is it – It's a transactional account.
- What does it do – You agree to have your benefits/salary paid into the account and it separates out money for rent and council tax. You can only access the remainder.
- A pre-paid Debit card provided that can be loaded with a set amount on a bi-weekly or monthly basis.
- Use of cash points, cash back and internet shopping.
- Money advise and budgeting skills available to members.
- Free to join** for LCC tenants affected by Welfare Reform.
- Can be converted into a full Credit Union current account as and when required.
- Available from April 2013

What Happens if I don't Pay?

- My Rent:
 - Reminder letters will automatically be sent;
 - Throughout the recovery process, IMT staff will try to contact you by 'phone, texts, or home visits;
 - They will make an affordable agreement with you, and give you welfare benefit advice;
 - A legal Notice will be served;
 - You will be taken to Court, incurring extra costs;
 - A Bailiff will be instructed to evict you, again incurring extra costs.
 - You may be deemed "intentionally" homeless, and LCC may have no duty to rehouse you.

What Happens if I don't Pay?

- My Council Tax:
 - First reminder sent 7-14 days after due date;
 - If paid within 3 weeks, second reminder sent 7-14 days after next instalment missed;
 - Final Notice – full balance due
 - Court summons
 - Liability Order – attachment of Earnings or Benefits, Bailiff action, Bankruptcy, Charging Order, etc.
 - Payment arrangements can be made if customer contacts

Important Points to Consider

- The date LCC receives your payment matters so your bill needs to be paid prior to the due date (5 day rule to be safe) to ensure it is received in time to credit your account to prevent any action being taken.
- Council Tax instalments are over 10 months by default but payers can request 12.
- Non payment of Council Tax could at its worst see you in Jail.
- Non payment of rent could at its worst see you evicted and you lose your home as a consequence.

What if I honestly can't afford to pay?

- **Options to consider include:**
 - Move to smaller, more affordable housing;
 - Waiting List application;
 - Mutual Exchange
 - Private Sector
 - Increase the hours you work or find a job;
 - Apply for Discretionary Housing Payment (short term housing benefit 'top up');
 - Apply for Council Tax Discretionary Relief Scheme (similar to DHP above);
 - Take in a lodger;
 - Ask non-dependants to increase their contribution to household expenses.

Where can I get help and advice!

- | | |
|------------------------------------------|----------|
| ● Welfare Rights Service | 256 8211 |
| ● Community Legal Advice Centre | 242 7620 |
| ● Revenues & Benefits | 252 7006 |
| ● Income Mgt. Team | 252 7007 |
| ● Mosaic (disabled people) | 231 8720 |
| ● SAFFA (ex-Forces & Families) | 261 6590 |
| ● Age UK (over 50's) | 299 2233 |
| ● Highfields Community Centre | 253 1053 |
| ● Community Advice & Law Service | 242 1120 |
| ● Race Equality Centre (Refugees/Asylum) | 299 9807 |
| ● Shelter Housing Aid & Research | 254 6064 |
| ● Housing Options | 252 7008 |

Questions and Answers

Thank You

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