

Issues around Lewes Road, London Road and the Level

Meeting between Maureen Winder (Triangle Residents Association), Philip Wells (London Road LAT) and Rob Stephenson (Round Hill Society and Community Works Small Groups Rep) - 26th November 2015.

Falling financial support from the local authority.

It seems the London Road Local Action Team's annual expenses of £150 is no longer being met by the Council, Philip needs to find another source for this sum. Does the same apply to other LATs in the city?

Maureen noted that building community cohesion needs small injections of money for everything from renting meeting space to buying plants and resources to improve an area. We will need to seek new sources of funding as local government continues to be squeezed.

Street drinking, injecting drugs and smoking cannabis.

Seats have recently been removed from the east end of Park Crescent as a solution to street drinkers gathering there. Over 20 years ago a shelter was removed from the NW corner of the Level for the same reason. This simply moves the issues elsewhere – but the solution is . . . what? The toilets beside the café on the Level now have a yellow 'sharps box' where considerate drug users can safely leave their used needles. What combination of circumstances is resulting in street injecting? Are the drugs prescribed? Are the needles supplied locally as part of a healthy addict programme? Are the users homeless? Young people are openly smoking cannabis in the park. Some are concerned about the message it sends to younger park users. The police (Insp. Brian McCarthy) has said they will raise the police profile in the park to deter it. There will soon be a new provider of drug and alcohol services in the city. Mike Newman of Pavilion (part of the new providers) spoke at the LAT, but it was not clear where needles will be issued. We felt they should be across the city, close to the homes of users, to minimise large gatherings as used to occur at a centre near Preston Circus.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (three or more unrelated people in a house sharing kitchen and bathroom).

In this area, close to the two universities, there are concentrations of HMOs occupied by students. The Council knows it is becoming a problem where too many student houses mean too many noisy nights. They have a scheme in place to stop newly registered HMOs operating as such if 10% or more of nearby homes are already HMOs, but it is a slow process under planning law. We need to see this planning rule being applied to limit the rise in HMOs where it is high.

Houses improved to the required standard must be registered by the Council as HMOs if the landlord seeks registration – there is no freedom to refuse permission under the law – except by the technical fix described. But there are at least 550 houses operating as HMOs which have not applied for a licence - maybe because they would not meet the safety standards required. The Council plans to act on these soon.

Neither university seems to think it is their job to meet housing need for their students, even as the press on with expansion. Both institutions Students Unions are actively working on improving what used to be called town-gown relations, and addressing housing quality being offered by private landlords. We have had meetings and have worked with their Community Liaison staff, and see value in doing more to draw attention to both poor quality housing and helping students integrate more into residential communities. We have heard of collapsing ceilings, blocked toilets and broken central heating sometimes left unrepaired for several days or even months (in the case of heating). Perhaps we can record cases, as well as poor management and damp, and publish as an awareness raiser, to help seek action from universities, landlords and their agents.

We had heard that the 4th biggest employer in the city is a pre-university training company called Study Group International. They specialise in bringing foreign youngsters here, teaching them whatever extra they need to bring them up to university entrance level, and then helping them get a place at a local university. We understand that they work closely with Sussex University. They have premises in the New England quarter, and have just acquired the former Buxtons site beside the level for more students. This process, along with commercial student housing new build and conversions is further changing the nature of our communities.

We plan to meet with Cllrs and officers of the Council to pursue issues raised here, and hope to find other ways of addressing them. These notes are designed to help other small groups, and to notify them of some possible actions. Please circulate and use. We plan more meetings and will welcome others early in the new year. Please keep in touch.

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