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## **BEESTON COMMUNITY FORUM**

### **Beeston Forum General Meeting - 7<sup>th</sup> February 2013**

#### **Agenda**

- 1. Chairman's Opening Remarks**
- 2. Apologies for absence**
- 3. Guest Speaker – Gill Clark, Leeds City Council**
- 4. Minutes of the meetings of the Beeston Forum held on Thursday 1st November 2012 and Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2013**
- 5. Discussion of Elland Road Park and Ride Scheme**
- 6. Police Report**
- 7. Correspondence**
- 8. Committee Report**
- 9. Possible Co-options to the Committee**
- 10. Any Other Business**

Minutes of the meeting of the Beeston Community Forum held on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2013

Attendance:- Christine Thornton (in the chair), Mr D. Bottomley, Mr. R. Bell, Mrs. D. Brooke, Mr. K. Burton, Mrs. S. Burton, Mr. J. Cunningham, PCSO S. Goulding (West Yorkshire Police), Mr. A. Grimwood, Mr. I. Grimwood, N. Hanif Esq., Mr. J. Hodgson, Mr. J. Hook, Mr. A. Kirby, Mr. A. Mahmood, Mr. Y. Mahmood, Mrs. M. Mason, Mr. J. Morton, Miss. E. Newton, Mr. M. Parry, Mr. J. Peckham, Mr. A. Pointon, Mr. E. Reilly, PCSO J. Rooks (West Yorkshire Police), Mrs. C. Stevens, Mr. F. Swift and Mr. R.J.W. Winfield

1. Chairman's Opening Remarks- Christine Thornton thanked the members present for their attendance, and hoped that members of the Forum had a good Christmas and that 2013 would bring them all they hope for. She welcomed those present to the Beeston Forum .

2. Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Congreve and John Fenton.

3. Guest Speakers. Christine Thornton introduced Shaun Harvey, the Chief Executive of Leeds United FC.

3.1 Shaun Harvey said that he would repeat Christine Thornton's comments about a Happy New Year, and joined her in hoping that 2013 would bring everything that Forum members would want. He recalled that he was due to attend the meeting of the Forum in November, but his attendance had been postponed as a result of dealing with what he described as the longest takeover of a football club known to mankind.

He noted that it had originally been the intention that he would speak about the proposals by Leeds United FC for a casino, and noted that Beeston is the community which is nearest to the football club. First, he explained the details of the takeover of the club. He explained that Leeds United FC has been bought by GFH Capital, a Private Equity Company based in Dubai. GFH Capital is in turn owned by an Islamic Investment Bank , Gulf Finance House, which is based in Bahrain. He noted that representatives of the bank have been seen at the Club and have been very supportive. The takeover of the club

would lead to a number of changes; however, little of significance would happen in the short term. He noted that the Club might sign a number of players and keep the fans happy. There would also be increased community involvement (particularly the Asian community) in the club's activities. The club's aim is to re engage people throughout the city.

With regard to the Casino, Shaun Harvey noted that things had moved on somewhat. He noted that Leeds United FC has bid to own the super casino licence in Leeds. He noted that Leeds had won the right to build a super casino as a result of which there would be a large casino in Leeds. There are five potential sites for the casino including Elland Road. He added that if the casino is to happen it would be a part of a new development on the west side of the ground, where the old John Charles stand, and the stand which had burnt down many years ago, had been located. The casino would be part of a redevelopment of that stand. The capacity of the stand would increase. Shaun Harvey added that planners are working to minimise the impact of the increase in capacity on visitors. He noted that the nearby police station is well under way in terms of being built. He noted that if the casino is built, there would be a need to manage the facility.

Shaun Harvey said that the changes at the club would be positive, both in terms of the ownership of and the development of the club. He said that Leeds United FC intends to hold a number of world class events. More events of higher profile would be good for the City and good for Beeston. Everything the club does should have a benefit for the local community. Shaun Harvey said that he had learned a lot as a result of coming to the Forum over the past 4 to 5 years. He said that it is easier for him to deal with issues, and noted that the Forum enables local residents to speak directly to the club.

3.2 The meeting opened up to questions and comments from the floor. Amongst issues raised were whether the Casino would benefit local residents, the future appearance of bands at the stadium, car parking arrangements near the stadium and the possible Park and Ride Scheme at Elland Road, the potential for a rail link at Elland Road the future role of Mr Ken Bates in Leeds United FC, the arrangements for the sale of tickets in FA Cup matches, traffic congestion on evenings of midweek matches and the enforcement of car parking restrictions in the vicinity of the stadium.

4. Christine Thornton introduced the second guest speaker, Zeb Ahmed.

4.1 Zeb Ahmed noted that he had attended a Forum meeting in 2012 and was taking this opportunity to update the Forum about the plans of his organisation, Aspiring Communities, for the former Ice Pak premises on Barkly Road. He noted that Aspiring Communities is a registered charity which is volunteer run and has 0% administration costs. The object of the organisation is to make communities a better place and to break down Stereotypes. Zeb Ahmed explained that Aspiring Communities is not an ordinary charity. Aspiring Communities operates in terms of our activities; community, recreation, health and religion. These have different needs in terms of development objectives. The purpose of the proposed facilities include a sports and recreation hall which would serve as a disaster recovery centre; that is to say a place to which local residents could go if there is a disaster in the area, a community hall, a skills centre, and a religious centre which would be multi faith, although this would include an Islamic Learning Centre. There would also be a small scale catering facility. Zeb Ahmed said that he had received lots of feedback about these plans.

4.2 A member of the audience said that Zeb Ahmed had not spoken to the local community and wondered whether the feedback to which he referred had come from the council. Zeb Ahmed said that he had had feedback from the councillors who represent the local community. The councillors had identified a number of concerns which had been raised by local residents. A member of the forum said that he had received a leaflet about the consultation meeting which Aspiring Communities would be holding during the following week. Another Forum member said that he had not been made aware of this meeting. Zeb Ahmed said that letters about the meeting had been posted last week. Christine Thornton asked who had received the letters. One Forum member, however argued that a community centre should be engaging the whole community. He argued that the letters advertising the consultation meeting should have been circulated widely and that he had learned about the meeting entirely by chance. Zeb Ahmed apologised for the situation which had developed.

4.3 A member of the audience noted that Aspring Communities had owned the Ice Pak site for around a year and that it had taken that long to get letters out to some members of the local community. In the meantime, there had been conflicting reports about the plans for the building; in particular some people who claimed to be working for Aspiring Communities said that the building would be a mosque. He explained that he attended the present meeting of the Forum by chance and learned that Zeb Ahmed would be addressing the meeting. He asked how Zeb Ahmed would get people on his side. He added that we are in a pre-application phase; a planning application has not yet been submitted. He could easily update Forum members about the situation. He apologised for the letters not having been widely distributed. Zeb Ahmed added that his organisation aimed to minimise the inconvenience to local residents. He would avoid outside pitches and retail shops. Aspiring Communities aimed to create local employment and to avoid the duplication of existing facilities. He explained that the factory had been messy; there had been lots of traffic including trucks at night. He added that the scheme addresses local aesthetics, and that this had been discussed with local councillors. He noted that the present building is quite large and that there had been a lot of consultation about shrinking the building. He noted that the building had been broken into and that there had been a number of fires. After such a break in, the building would be secured only for it to be broken into again. The police were aware of this and were helping. He added that there would be off road parking. Half the buildings on the site would go and be replaced by car parking space for the facility.

4.4 Christine Thornton asked whether there would be a madrasa, and would that generate more traffic and on street parking. Zeb Ahmed said that a planning application would be submitted in mid to end January and that there had been 5 to 6 months of consultation with planners. Zeb Ahmed said that there would be no monster structure. A member of the audience said that there is already a monster structure ; the building already towers above neighbouring houses. Could the highest building be reduced in size? Zeb Ahmed said that this could not happen, but that the height of buildings would be kept within existing dimensions,

4.5 A member of the audience asked Zeb Ahmed why he is proposing to build his facility in Beeston. Zeb Ahmed said that this would make a difference. A Forum member pointed out that he has lived in Beeston for 45 years and cannot see the locals using the centre as there is a 'them and us' attitude. Zeb Ahmed said that this needs to be broken down. He added that there is a need for community integration and that the community needs to be a part of the scheme. If Aspiring Communities did not believe in the scheme the money would be spent elsewhere and the buildings would remain empty.

4.6 Christine Thornton said that to many people a minaret means a mosque. She noted that she had recently been speaking to Councillors Gabriel and Ogilvie when the subject of the plans had arisen in the conversation. Both councillors had said that the building would include a mosque. She noted that when Zeb Ahmed had appeared before the Forum last year, he had told the meeting that the building would not be a mosque. Zeb Ahmed said that the building would be an Islamic Learning Centre, and that the uses of the building are described on the plans. , He added that the plans had not been put forward. Christine Thornton said that she is not particularly opposed a minaret , but noted that on his previous visit to the Forum Zeb Ahmed had denied that a mosque would be built.

4.7 Richard Bell said that he is suffering from a crisis of confidence. He recalled that when Zeb Ahmed last appeared at a meeting of the Forum, he had stated that the building would be a community centre. He had then seen details of a fund raising event in Nelson advertised on the internet. This stated that the building would be a mosque. Thus, Zeb Ahmed had lost all credibility. He understood the need to bring communities together, but how is this object achieved by bringing grief to local residents? Zeb Ahmed said that he wants to make a difference and that this does not come easy. Richard Bell noted that the plans are for an Islamic Centre. A member of the audience said that Zeb Ahmed is seeking to cloud the issue of what Aspiring Communities is about. The organisation wants to get people together , but all they are doing is pushing people away. He added that Zeb Ahmed had stated that the building would be an Islamic Centre. He said that Islamic means Asian and that this causes divisions. He added that 'people on the other side of the park do not like us'.

4.8 At this point, PCSO Jonathan Rooks stated that he did not like some of the remarks that had been made at the meeting and explained that he would therefore be leaving the meeting. Christine Thornton reminded him that the Police Report had been moved up the agenda. Christine Thornton also asked PCSO Rooks whether he was claiming that anything that had been said is racist. John Hodgson noted that as he was attending the meeting in his capacity as a PCSO , it is his duty to put his personal feelings aside. John Hodgson felt that the action which PCSO Rooks had proposed goes against his police training, which is not to get involved in politics. PCSO Rooks explained that that is why he would be leaving the meeting. However, PCSO Rooks was persuaded to remain in the meeting and Zeb Ahmed continued his presentation , with the full agreement of the meeting.

4.9 Zeb Ahmed explained that there would be four phases to the development of the building. Firstly, the asbestos had been removed to the building. He pointed out that contrary to a number of rumours in the community, the asbestos had been removed by a licensed practitioner. Zeb Ahmed said that he would be able to show anyone who is interested the relevant receipts. Secondly, there would be the occupation of the officers as a temporary community centre in order to secure the site with a temporary car parking and catering facility. Thirdly, there would be the construction of a new sports facility and a community and learning centre. Fourthly, the front office block would be demolished and the space used for car parking.

4.10 John Cunningham asked how far back is the building from the road. Zeb Ahmed said that the building would be 40-50 metres from the road. It is a self contained unit. He added that he does not want to mess around with off road car parking. The building would be nice and secure and there would be nothing more monstrous than there is at the moment. He added that the trees at the car park would come down due to worries by Leeds City Council about issues connected with safety and fire. The council would erect lighting down the side of the building. Christine Thornton noted that Zeb Ahmed had been involved in a dialogue with Sikhs, Jews and Christians. She asked whether these are religious leaders or lay people. Zeb Ahmed confirmed that these are lay people.

4.11 John Hook asked whether the centre would be open late at night or operate under restricted hours. Zeb Ahmed said that restrictions to 8 a.m to 10.30p.m would be imposed by Leeds City Council. John Hook noted that when Ice Park used the site, Ice Pak wagons ran through the night. Zeb Ahmed added that we would need a range of uses to satisfy the community and give a mixed development.

4.12 Arthur Kirby asked whether there would be any costs associated with using the centre. Zeb Ahmed said that the sports hall would be heavily subsidised, and he hoped that free services would be available for locals. He added that there would be separate entrances to the various parts of the building to enable the people to use it; he recognised that people would not

want to go through a mosque to go to a sports centre.

4.13 John Hodgson noted that Zeb Ahmed had been advised to approach the subject with the councillors and the planning department. He felt that Zeb Ahmed had been led down the wrong path. He noted that when Mr Malik opened the Hamara Centre, he said that he would never give up the ethos of helping the Asian elderly. He asked whether the trainers would be of all races. Zeb Ahmed said that sports centre staff would be non-Asian

4.14 Andrew Pointon said that he is very excited about this development. He felt that the best thing that could have happened to the site is to have manufacturing industry, creating jobs; however Zeb Ahmed investing in the area is something which would be welcomed. He added that muslim and sikh people are amongst his friends and that he is proud of this.. He added that this is the kind of integration which we need and this would break down fear. If there is a mosque, so what? He noted that there are plenty of churches in the area. What is the problem? He would reserve judgement about the plans until he has seen greater detail.

4.15 Jeremy Morton noted that he serves on the Beeston Festival Committee. The event is a multicultural family fun day. He added that there is , unfairly, often fear, due to the actions of extremists, which has gone against integration. Christine Thornton said that she agreed with the remarks made by Andrew Pointon , but added that it is also good for people to say as they see it and be honest. She added that prior to her relatively recent retirement, she had worked for 48 years in the NHS , as a nurse, midwife, health visitor and trainer and had looked after people regardless of their race. She has great grandchildren who are half Pakistani and a number of long term friends who are Asian.

4.16 Bill Birch felt that Aspiring Communities has been badly advised by the Councillors. He noted that he is involved in a project in which a mining village is being built in Crofton. His group had avoided the councillors and had spoken directly to the local community. He noted that Zeb Ahmed had come to the meeting with something which looks like a finished product and had appeared to be confrontational. Zeb Ahmed, however said that the ideas are not a finished product

4.17 A member of the audience noted that he had asked Aspiring Communities for their main aims and in particular whether their building would be a mosque. Christine Thornton said that she could not care whether the building is a mosque, but the community needs to know the detail of the proposal. A member of the audience noted that Zeb Ahmed had told the first Forum meeting which he attended that the building would be multi faith. Members of other faiths would not go into a mosque. Zeb Ahmed agreed with this point and noted the tensions which had occurred at the meeting.

4.18 Pauline Johnson said that she was happy with the plans for sports and community facilities , but unhappy about the religious aspects of the plans. Christine Thornton asked whether a religious group which wished to hire the building for religious worship would be allowed into the building. Zeb Ahmed said that the group would be allowed in . If you never connect with such groups, you will never connect with society. He said that this project will be different but would need community support.

*(Secretary's Note: In view of the sensitivity attaching to the discussion of the plans by Aspiring Communities , I took the unusual step of e mailing a draft of the minutes to the Chairman of the Forum, Christine Thornton, in advance of the publication of the minutes. It should also be noted that following the meeting, Zeb Ahmed and his team remained at the venue and spoke amicably with a number of Forum members, including individuals who had expressed criticism of the plans)*

## 5. Police Report

5.1 PCSO Rooks noted that the level crime had fallen by 700 in the Holbeck NPT area (City, Rothwell, Morley and Beeston). When outer areas are considered, crime had fallen by 800. In response to a question from Christine Thornton, PCSO Rooks confirmed that these figures include the Christmas period.

5.2 John Cunningham asked whether any action was being taken in relation to prostitution in Holbeck, notably around the Kings Arms. PCSO Rooks said that this is a massve issue. Prostitutes are attracted there by the availability of drugs , but the police are hitting the issue hard, arresting people and issuing ASBOs

5.3 John Hook noted that there is a problem with bikers on Gipsy Lane going up to Middleton Woods. At 6.50p.m he had almost been knocked down by bikers with no lights. PCSO Rooks said that the police would target that issue; this could be made a local priority. He added that if issues are brought to these meetings, the police could focus on them for a month.

6. Christine Thornton explained that the remaining items on the agenda would be deferred. She noted that she had been informed by Robert Winfield that there are no urgent items of correspondence.