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17 September, 2008

EDITOR'S NOTE

This News Desk consists of items that could not be included in the magazine itself, either because they came too late, or because they could not be fitted easily into the magazine's format.

UNIVERSITIES EXPAND INTAKE OF STUDENTS FOR 2008-2009 SESSION

DESPITE PREVIOUSLY INDICATING THAT THEY WERE PLANNING NO SIGNIFICANT GROWTH IN STUDENT INTAKE, BOTH OF NOTTINGHAM'S UNIVERSITIES HAVE made substantial increases in their intake for the coming academic year.

This will have a year-on-year cumulative impact on demand for HMOs as the extra numbers of students feed into the system.

It will be great news for landlords, but it threatens to make a nonsense of the Council's strategies for balanced and sustainable communities

LANDLORD FINED FOR FAILING TO APPLY FOR AN HMO LICENCE

AT A HEARING AT NOTTINGHAM MAGISTRATES COURT ON WEDNESDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2008, MAURICE JOHN DOYLE OF ST CATHERINES RD, Grantham, a window cleaner and landlord, was fined, ordered to pay costs and a victim surcharge for failing to properly register an HMO.

Mr. Doyle owns a three-storey house in Sherwin Road, Lenton which he rents to groups of students.

Despite warnings from the city council, Mr Doyle failed to apply for a house of multiple occupation (HMO) licence and the case was taken to the Magistrates' Court by the City Council.

Mr. Doyle acknowledged that the Council had given him numerous opportunities to apply for an HMO Licence between November 2007 and April 2008, and accepted that he had been 'tardy' in applying for the licence. However, he could not offer any other reason for his failure to comply with the provisions of the Housing Act 2004.

The Magistrates commented that Mr. Doyle's behaviour was bordering on being negligent, and that City Council officers had bent over backwards to help him.

NOTE: Mr. Doyle's case had originally come before the Magistrates' Court in May 2008, and was reported on by us in the May's issue of News Desk. Mr. Doyle failed to appear at that hearing. Subsequently, he appealed against the Court's ruling. So, the hearing at the Magistrates' Court on the 11 September, was his second 'go'.

GOVERNMENT ACTS TO STOP HARD SURFACING OF GARDENS

FROM 1 OCTOBER 2008, THE GOVERNMENT WILL INTRODUCE CHANGES TO THE GENERAL PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT ORDER MAKING THE hard surfacing of more than 5 m² of domestic front gardens permitted development only where the surface in question is rendered permeable.

Use of traditional materials, such as impermeable concrete, where there is no facility in place to ensure permeability, requires an application for planning permission. For more information, see:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pavingfrontgardens>

This is not going to stop landlords from converting HMO front gardens into much-valued (by tenants) off-road parking spaces. But it is going to prevent the sort of wholesale concreting of frontages that blights the appearance of so many streets in neighbourhoods with large numbers of HMOs.

STUDENT HOUSING ACTION PLAN (SHAP) UPDATE

AFTER THE SERIES OF CONSULTATION MEETINGS ON THE SHAP LAST SUMMER, PROGRESS IN PUTTING TOGETHER A NEW STUDENT HOUSING ACTION PLAN (SHAP II) appeared to have come to a halt after the last meeting of the Student Strategy Leadership Group in November, 2007.

The Council has now approached Dr. Darren Smith, Senior Lecturer in Human Geography at Brighton University, and his Research Associate, Jo Sage, to carry out work intended to restart the development of a new SHAP.

The Council hopes to achieve a plan specific and unique to Nottingham, but that also contains examples of good practice from other university towns and cities across the UK.

The aim is to have the plan completed by the end of this year.

NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION

AS MENTIONED IN THIS SUMMER'S ISSUE OF THE MAGAZINE, MEMBERS OF THE GROUP LISTENED TO THE FULL COUNCIL'S DEBATE OF A MOTION ABOUT HMOs and possible changes to the Use Classes Order. This is the formal result of that debate.

The Council RESOLVED to note that:-

- in England a family house and a house in multiple occupation (HMO) are in the same Use Class, in planning terms, which means that planning permission is not required to use what was a family house as a HMO.
- if the planning rules in England were changed to create a separate Use Class for HMOs, it would be much easier to control their distribution and local density in the City
- having a high density of HMOs can have a detrimental effect on local communities, for example in terms of waste, parking and noise, and can eventually lead to communities becoming unbalanced and unsustainable.

Therefore Council resolves:

(i) to ask the Government to change the planning rules in England to create a separate Use Class for HMOs and to require planning consent for new dormer windows whether facing a highway or not, and

(ii) to support those who are campaigning for a business tax on HMOs to be kept and spent locally and to write to all Nottingham MPs on the same matter.

THE MINISTER'S RETURN TO NOTTINGHAM

AT THE END OF HIS VISIT IN MAY, IAIN WRIGHT SAID THAT WANTED TO RETURN TO NOTTINGHAM AND LOUGHBOROUGH DURING THE PARLIAMENTARY Summer Recess.

Immediately after his visit, an invitation for him to return to Nottingham was sent on behalf of the Nottingham Action Group and the City Council. The Minister's Diary Secretary assured us that the Minister's office would be in contact soon to arrange the visit.

Despite several attempts by members of the Group's Committee and officers from Nottingham City Council to get further information about a visit, no information has been forthcoming from the Minister's office.

Perhaps a case of 'Events, dear boy, events'?

CHANGING FACES

THIS YEAR HAS SEEN THE DEPARTURE OF TWO CITY COUNCIL OFFICERS WITH WHOM THE NOTTINGHAM ACTION GROUP HAS WORKED CLOSELY AND WHOSE work and support have been much appreciated by the Group. Barrie James has retired from the Council's Public Health team, and John Robinson, Director of Environmental Services, has moved on to Gedling Borough Council.

Barrie James' successor, Lorraine Rayner, is now in post and we look forward to establishing a good working relationship with her.

Also this year, Michael Lees from Nottingham Trent University, though staying with the university, has moved on to new responsibilities. Michael's understanding of what it is the NAG is trying to achieve, along with the establishment of Trent's Code of Discipline, have been important advances.

If somewhat late, it is also right to mention that Keith Jones, Registrar at Nottingham University, retired at the end of 2006. It was Mr. Jones who, having heard residents' concerns at a meeting of the QMC Forum in November, 2003, accepted an invitation to tour neighbourhoods in Dunkirk, Lenton and Wollaton Park in March 2004, and who took on board the need for the University to begin to accept responsibility for its off-campus students, their behaviour, and their impact on established residents.

Keith Jones and the Nottingham Action Group established a good working relationship based on mutual respect.

He was replaced as Registrar in January, 2007 by Dr. Paul Greatrix

The one thing that all four have in common is that they are all 'gentle men' in the true sense of the word.

The Committee of the Nottingham Action Group on HMOs want to put on record its thanks for the work all four have done in trying to help solve the problems we all experience in our neighbourhoods, and for the way in which they have interacted with the Group and its members.

We wish them all well for the future.

**DON'T FORGET
NAG OPEN MEETING
24 SEPTEMBER
7.00 p.m.
HILLSIDE CLUB**