

Notes of a Meeting between Calthorpe Resident's Society (CRS) Committee Members and University of Birmingham (UoB) Vice-Chancellor's Office

Held at the Vice-Chancellor's Office, UoB on Tuesday 3rd, January, 2023 at 1630

Present

Peter Arnold (PA) (Chair, CRS)

Nick Brown (NB) (Committee Member, CRS)

Jonathan Middle (JM) (Committee Member, CRS)

Adam Tickell (AT) (Vice Chancellor, UoB)

Trevor Payne (TP) (Director of Estates, UoB)

Simon Bray (Sb) (Director of Site Services, UOB)

Welcome & Introductions

1. Following brief introductions of all present, PA gave an outline of the background; scope and work of the CRS including some of the concerns expressed by members about the University particularly its recent rapid expansion. He then expressed the wish that the meeting would help to foster a closer relationship between the University and the local Community that CRS represents.
2. The meeting was an open discussion firstly about the university itself and its current plans before proceeding to consider how to enhance community relationships with the university.

University – discussion of current plans

1. AT outlined the recent expansion in student numbers to a current level of 34/35000 in total. He explained how the expansion in UK student numbers had increased rapidly such that in the UK as a whole almost 1 in 2 young persons now go to university. However, government funding has not matched this expansion. This means that, particularly, in science, technical and medical courses UK students are taught at a considerable loss. Teaching and research monies are insufficient to balance costs. This has led the university (in line with other UK universities) to increase numbers of International Students. The strategy of the university is to further increase these numbers but solely through expansion of its Dubai Campus. There are no plans to increase numbers studying at the Edgbaston Campus.
2. With regard to the Estate there is currently a review of the Estate which is due to conclude this year but the headline message is that there are no plans to expand the site at present. The Estate plan will be to repurpose/refurbish/rebuild on the existing site and to work toward Carbon Zero by 2035. There will be, for example, a new Clinical Skills Teaching Unit next to the library and a new Biosciences building also using the existing site. TP (who has in the past attended some CRS meetings) kindly agreed to host tours for interested members later in the year.
3. The university confirmed that with Pritchatt's Park it currently has a surplus of student accommodation and has no plans in the next 5 years to commission any further residential block building. SB and AT stated that UoB has no stake in any of the plans at the Trees site on Bristol Road; they opined that other universities in the City were, in contrast to UoB, short of student accommodation and may have involvement with that site. They consider that much of the student accommodation in Selly Oak is taken up by students from Aston and BCU.
4. Discussion then turned to traffic and parking. In response to questions, AT and SB both confirmed that the University supported alternatives to car use such as use of public transport (this is subsidised an students/staff only pay £1 for bus journeys) and use of bicycles and e-scooters. There are stands for bicycle hire and e-scooter hire on campus and the university has invested in safety training for students and staff that includes bicycle safety. On the specific issue of car parking AT said that there was really no reason for staff to park off-site. There is a surplus of car parking available at a low cost of £1 per day. AT and SB agreed to remind staff of the availability of parking on-site and to ask them not to use residential streets.

Development of closer relationships between local residents and the university

1. PA introduced by saying that historically there had been more involvement and attendance at, for example, the Barber Institute for concerts and lectures as well as the University Summer Festival. Such events have restarted following the Covid hiatus and all agreed that increasing attendance again would be desirable. NB suggested that the CRS Newsletter may be a place where events could be publicised; JM suggested that, in addition, information could be placed on the CRS web-site.
2. It was agreed that information on University events would be forwarded monthly to NB for further dissemination to CRS members.
3. PA stated that CRS and its contacts might be able to provide opportunities for students to work on projects of mutual benefit, for example, researching archives, assisting newsletter or promotional materials or work with Martineau Gardens or on environmental matters. AT agreed that these could be of benefit; TB and SB suggested that the best way forward would be through a single point of contact at the University namely the Community Liaison Lead and they agreed to facilitate contact
4. Finally, PA raised the Civic Universities Agreement signed in 2019. It was thought that this meeting formed a key part of that agreement to work with the local community and further to that, AT said he would be happy to attend a future CRS event.
5. It was agreed that it had been a good meeting and to meet again next year in January 2024