Update: HMOs

New rules will apply soon to many more multi-occupancy dwellings that presently do not qualify for licensing.

A White Paper is expected soon, to become law this October that will redefine Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) by removing the rule on number of storeys. Any dwelling with 5 or more people sharing facilities will need to be licensed.

This will include those old conversions without building regulations (Section 257) that will likely be given say six months to apply, be inspected and comply. Some properties may not be viable to continue as multi-occupancy dwellings.

Anthony has found out that under the present system, Bristol City Council inspects each HMO every five years and checks all complaints (407 last year, of which 200 resulted in action taken). Students are particularly at risk of poorer accommodation and last year were advised "don't rent yet" to optimise their choice and experience amid student concern to resolve their accommodation early.

National changes in standards lack teeth though Anthony was pleased to support Bristol City Council’s promotion of the Acorn ethical lettings standard which operates with no upfront fees.

Better standards for students

Both University Student Unions operate a letting agency with co-operative landlords (UWE has around 250 units; UoB rather more) with no upfront fees and works to the West of England rental standard alongside a robust code of conduct. It is customer-focused, providing support and pastoral care. Students feedback appraisal of accommodation and landlord’s/agents’ service standards.

Bristol has had many demand-led years. This year Bristol’s student numbers are static but University business plans may change. There are recent local examples of the heated Bristol market driving some HMOs back to family houses. Further, this year supply of premises for students exceeded demand.

Anthony says "It is high-time the definition of 'HMOs' and 'small HMOs' was changed to reflect occupancy rather than the .building so that proper standards can be delivered through licensing. This is particularly welcome for those older conversions that may not comply with today’s tougher regulations on thermal and sound insulation as well as safety. This is a big business that has been over-promoted but under-regulated so I hope for better outcomes for our city, long-term residents and all tenants”.

Trees for Cotham

No further business sponsorship for trees has been found since Anthony steered through the HSBC tree in Whiteladies Road though Bristol University are providing large funds for many trees. Anthony says "I have pushed private, commercial and memorial tree sponsorship but this all needs more publicity." To find out more about Tree Management, Sponsorship and Planting in Cotham or the wider Bristol area go to: https://www.bristol.gov.uk/museums-parks-sports-culture/tree-management
Playing Out

If you have ever wished your street and pavements could be safer spaces for children to play and parents to meet, the not-for-profit organisation Playing Out can help.

Playing Out was set up by parents in Bristol supporting residents to organise street play and links with the Bristol Play Network. Children can enjoy playing freely and safely and making friends. Neighbours can meet and build a sense of community and ownership of their street.

Playing Out is part of a long-term project to shape Bristol into a Child Friendly City, a global UNICEF initiative, which aims to give children their rights as young citizens as well as having their needs better understood and fulfilled.

You can read more about the Bristol Child Friendly City project here: http://bristolchildfriendlycity.blogspot.co.uk/

If you are interested in starting playing out you need to apply to the council for a temporary play street order, set up in 2011, closing the street to through traffic for certain times. Volunteer stewards from the street ensure children stay in the closure area and escort drivers in and out of the street.

Why don’t you speak to your neighbours about asking Playing Out to come to your street for an initial chat and hopefully follow-up help with the application process and provision of free kit to ensure your street plays out safely. It generally takes about three months for a street to start playing out, so now is a great time to start thinking about it for the spring. There are around 100 streets playing out in Bristol, including one in Cotham - yours could be next!

Visit www.playingout.net, call them on 0117 953 7167 or visit their Facebook page ‘Bristol Playing Out’

Anthony says “this is a tried and safe way to reclaim our streets. Usually timed on a day between school end and return from work it means that outside space can be best used by children with minimal effect. It’s good for grown-ups too!”

Residents Parking Latest!

The outcome of the Cotham North RPS review has now been released by the Council - https://www.bristol.gov.uk/parking/cotham-north. Most importantly Blue Badge holder bays are finally being updated while Elliston Lane will now have double yellow lines for its entire length. Interestingly Redland Road will become the second dual permit road in Bristol so the bays can be used by anyone with a Cotham North (CN) or Redland (RD) permit. Miles says “solutions such as this make the schemes far better for residents. That’s why I’ve asked the Mayor about updating other roads that border two schemes, such as Cotham Brow which is split between the Cotham and Kingsdown schemes, to also be dual permit roads and he seemed keen to work with us on this”.

Unfortunately when Miles asked the Mayor about reducing the cost of the permits once schemes was operating, something the Lib Dems had planned before the Mayor took office, he was told this would no longer be happening.

Work is also soon to begin on Arley Hill and Redland Road to improve this rat run, created after council officials stopped vehicles on Cheltenham Road from being able to turn left into Bath Buildings. As part of this the parking bays along this stretch of road will be repositioned. Anthony says “I have persuaded the Mayor to ask council officers to listen to my list suggested improvements. So if you have any ideas or have any comments please get in touch”.

Empty Buildings for the Homeless: As reported in the press, Anthony appealed at Full Council for landlords of empty commercial buildings to contact BCC about their use as temporary shelters for the increasing numbers of rough sleepers on our streets. Anthony says “some of these buildings are no longer viable as offices and I know their potential for conversion to housing for the homeless or to deliver accommodation generally, so desperately needed for people in this city hit by huge rents and prices because of the shortage. Yet currently over 8000 homes have planning approvals that are being sat on by developers”.

Tackling isolation in our community: Anthony has tabled a Public Forum statement asking the Neighbourhood Partnership to find out how big an issue is loneliness in our community and how it is being addressed. He says “it is our caring for others that marks us as a society but we often focus on the tangible stuff like streets”.

Another drinking venue for Chandos Road? A planning Application, 15/06291/F, has been made for a change of use to a MicroPub at 22 Chandos Rd, the empty convenience store. Licensing aspects will have to be considered alongside this by Bristol City Council.

Winter Wanderland: around Chandos Rd, 27/28 Feb, 6-9pm. A magical walking trail of illuminated homes to light up the winter streets, open to everyone. Create a display in your window or garden, or follow the trail on the night. For more information or to get involved visit our website www.windowwanderland.com

Cotham Neighbourhood Forum: 7-9pm, Monday 15th Feb, Charnwood House 6th Form Centre, Cotham Park, Cotham, BS6 6BU.

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